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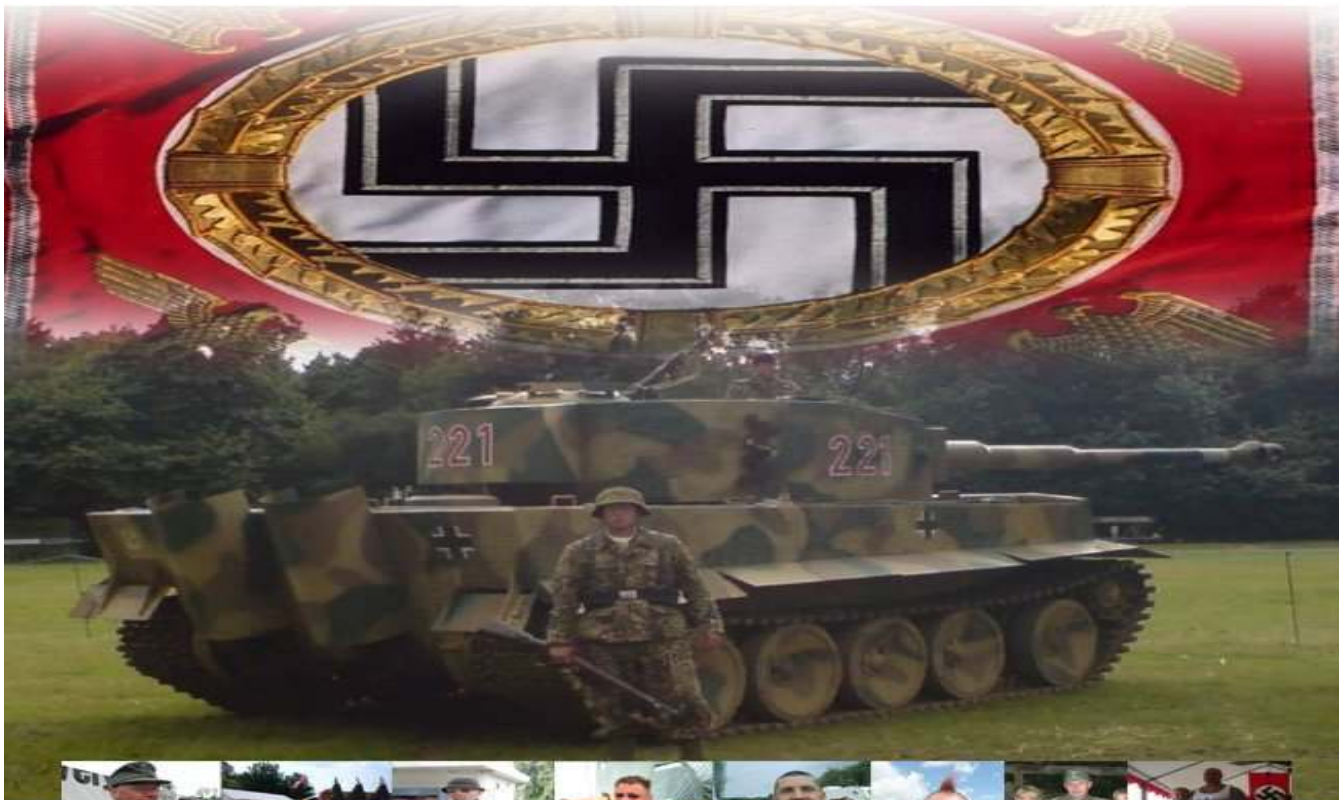
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Third Reich

Volume
29

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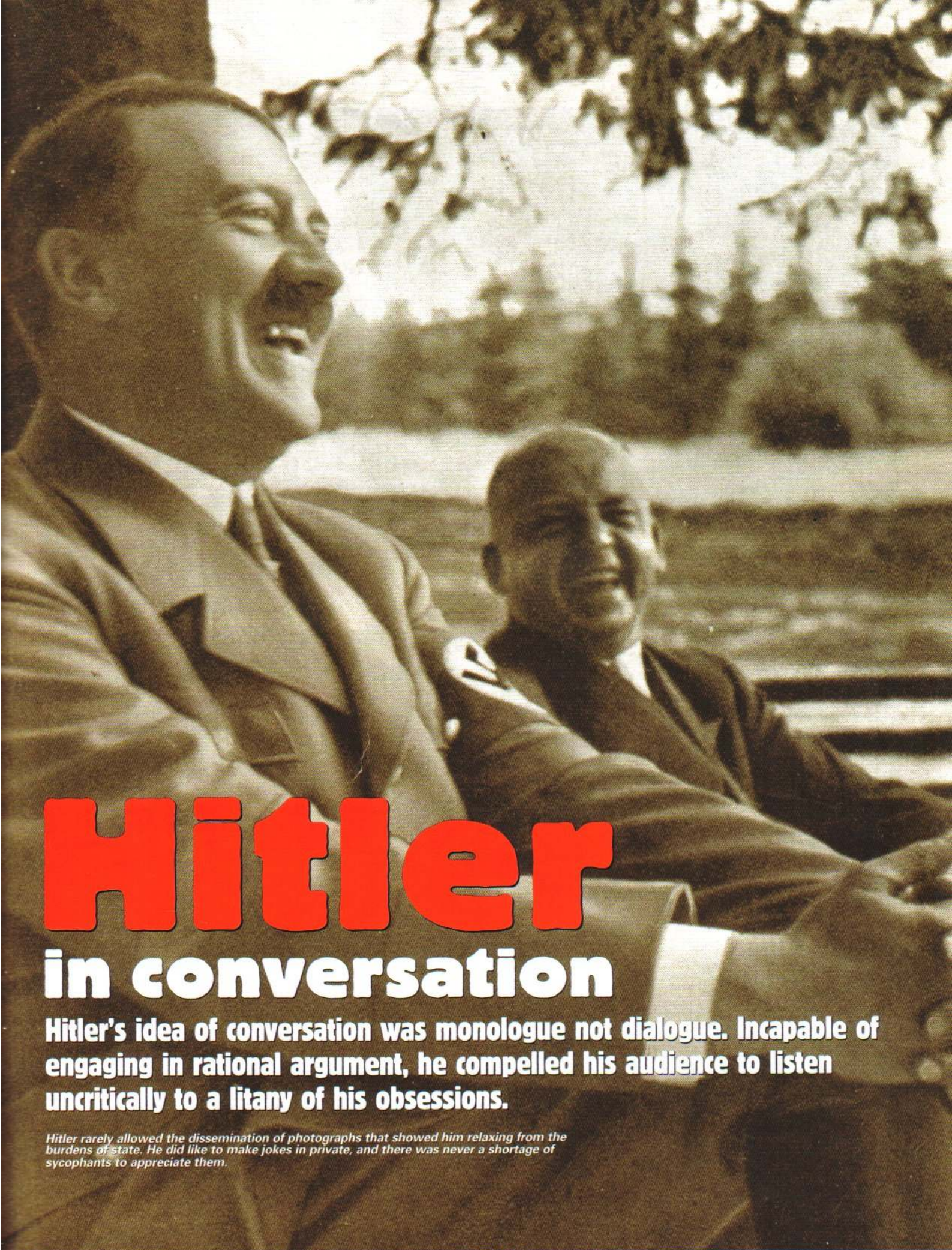
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Hitler

in conversation

Hitler's idea of conversation was monologue not dialogue. Incapable of engaging in rational argument, he compelled his audience to listen uncritically to a litany of his obsessions.

Hitler rarely allowed the dissemination of photographs that showed him relaxing from the burdens of state. He did like to make jokes in private, and there was never a shortage of sycophants to appreciate them.



Mealtimes with Hitler were calculated to produce indigestion. The main requirements for a guest were to be a good listener, not interrupting and agreeing enthusiastically with the contents of each of the Führer's diatribes.



HITLER'S MOST DANGEROUS enemies, Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill, worked 14 hours a day or more, every day of the war. Hitler seldom 'worked' – in the conventional sense – at all. His daily routine, established during his earliest days as Chancellor, was to emerge around noon, having browsed through the newspapers. After the war began, there was a daily military briefing in the early afternoon and another in the evening, but the main business of the day remained what had been Hitler's primary activity since his days in the men's hostel in pre-1914 Vienna: talking. Not discourse or argument, but Hitler holding forth on his favourite subjects.

AFTER DINNER SPEAKING

In the early days of the Party, his monologues were delivered in a café – significantly the same café and from the same table. After he became Chancellor, he spent much of the afternoon lecturing the assembled company at lunch. From about 2.30 until 4.00 o'clock or later, he pontificated at the head of the table. Up to fifty people might join Hitler for lunch – his secretaries, visiting Gauleiters and favoured officials – but seldom any other senior Nazis. Goebbels, the fount of Berlin gossip,

might make an appearance if he wanted something, but had learned to stay away. Goering was the same even before he fell from favour; he told Speer that the food was as uninspiring as the company.

At lunch, afternoon tea – an immovable ritual at the Obersalzberg – and after supper, Hitler would continue to talk. Adjutants despatched to Berlin or the Wolf's Lair, returned to their generals' headquarters with tales of how Bormann and the other toadies struggled to stay awake. And how, once Hitler finally went to bed, the mood lightened, the survivors sparking up cigarettes and pouring drinks.

HITLER'S 'HUMOUR'

Hitler enjoyed a reputation as something of a mimic. He would chose any one of the high-ranking Nazis as the butt of his humour – and there were plenty of targets. He would also attempt a joke when in particularly high spirits. Goering and Goebbels came in for their share: Hitler's favourite jest was to ask a visiting guest if he knew the difference between an amp and a volt. Before they could respond, Hitler would explain: "Goebbels and Goering. Goebbels represents the amount of rubbish a man can talk in one hour whereas Goering is the quantity of metal that can be pinned on a man's chest in the same period".

As his ascent continued, Hitler's 'table talk' was full of thoughts for the future. Party Secretary Martin Bormann kept records of this bizarre cocktail of inanity and insanity. Hitler often contradicted himself and Bormann sometimes twisted the words of the oracle to gain sanction for projects of his own. Hitler's table talk provided a chilling vision of the future, had the Nazis won the war. In his late night ramblings, he fantasized about a German colonial empire in the east. The inhabitants would be slaughtered or driven beyond the Ural Mountains where a guerrilla war would be maintained to keep the German farmer-soldier communities on their toes. The Crimea would become a Nazi 'Club Med', reached from Berlin via high-speed double-decker trains.

HEALTHY ADVICE

Health was a perennial favourite topic. A vegetarian since the early 1930s, Hitler's idea of dinner was a baked potato with cottage cheese and linseed oil. He would chide his guests for their reluctance to admit the superior nutritional value of vegetables. On one subject, he was ahead of his time: Hitler hated smoking and told his entourage that it caused lung cancer: a truth opposed by much of the medical establishment at the time. His own dentist argued that cigarettes



Holding Court

Hitler was an irrepressible bore. Eye-witness testimonies and verbatim transcripts of his ramblings attest to this. His version of conversation was to hold court to a team of lackeys who would listen to his monologues without interruption. An emotionally unstable and, at the beginning, insecure individual, he was hyper-sensitive to criticism. If someone took an opposing viewpoint he behaved like an hysterical prima donna until he got his way.



Above: Hitler is surrounded by a host of supporters at a party in the new Reichstag. He was courted by opportunists like Heinrich Hoffmann (to Hitler's right) who put up with the Führer's boorishness to serve their own ends.

Left: In the early days of the Party, Hitler's monologues were delivered in a café, significantly the same café and from the same table.

Below: Ten years on from the Putsch, and Hitler addresses an adoring assembly at the Party's Munich head-quarters – the Brown House – regaling all with his rags-to-riches stories.





Above: Very few of Hitler's generals, with the exception of von Reichenau, Model and Guderian would argue face-to-face with the Führer over military tactics. Behind Hitler stands the prince of 'yes men', Wilhelm Keitel, dubbed the 'lackey' by his detractors.

Top right: Most successful megalomaniacs surround themselves with devoted followers. Hitler was no exception. Here he charms his arrogant and stupid Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop.

Right: Sometimes Hitler would attempt a joke. For a year or so after Munich, revelling in the success of his duplicity, he did impressions of Neville Chamberlain.



killed bacteria in the mouth and thus improved one's oral hygiene. Hitler ranged freely over all manner of issues. He lambasted contemporary trends in painting and architecture, arguing for a return to classical forms. On education, he wondered whether all boys should be sent to boarding schools; forced to survive on their own, the process of social Darwinism would see the strongest emerge victorious. (Perhaps El Alamein, like Waterloo, was won on the fields of Eton?)

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

Hitler's thoughts on religion were a source of confusion to his followers, especially Himmler, whose deepening belief in spiritualism and neo-pagan ritual inspired his assaults on the church in Germany. Hitler would "swear to God", using it as more than just a turn of phrase. "God," he told General Otto Wagener, "is the logos of St. John, which has become flesh and lives in the world... conferring on it driving force and constituting the full meaning and context of the world". Hitler expressed contempt for the Catholic faith of his native Austria. To him, the innumerable saints,

what he called the hierarchy of "auxiliary deities", violated the commandment to "have no other Gods before me".

Hitler's wider political beliefs and his lopsided views of world history were aired almost daily. His views on Britain afford a glimpse into the skewed world of Adolf Hitler. He regarded the British as essentially "pragmatic rather than ideological", slow to act because the English Channel gave them a vital security buffer. Only interested in their own welfare, he thought the British (he always said "English") were easier to deal with as a result. He also thought them extremely insincere and, at heart, anti-German because of the First World War. Such hatred, he told his entourage shortly before the war, was a sign of racial inferiority: the intellectually superior do not indulge in hate. (This was the same man who wrote in *Mein Kampf* that the Jews should have been gassed as "punishment" for starting the First World War.)

RANTING & REMINISCING

After the war turned against him, Hitler's table talk changed. He sought refuge in nostalgia for the glory days, the 'years of

struggle'. He talked for longer too: keeping his secretaries up until 5.00 am. with reminiscences about his early youth in Vienna or how difficult it had been to book speaking venues in the early years of the Party. The past was the only thing to look forward to.

SPEECH THERAPY

In the Berlin bunker in 1945, Hitler told one of his doctors that talking was like a drug to him. If he did not talk about other subjects, he explained, he would spend the night pouring over the situation maps in his head, seeing every division lost at Stalingrad. If he ever saw the divisions of course, it was as abstract formations, mere flags on a map – not the thousands of flesh and blood human beings they represented. Hitler never expressed any remorse for Stalingrad or sympathy for the dead and their families. His table talk is interesting for what is not on the agenda. He had no friends (and, like David Lloyd George, did not deserve any). Adult relationships of any kind were a mystery to him. His comments on marriage and families betray his towering ignorance of personal life.

Hitler's Table Talk

Transcripts of Hitler's 'table talk' exist for part of 1942 and for February 1945. The rest are missing. Until 1942 there was no formal record of what were, after all, random monologues across a wide range of subjects. We rely on the testimony of surviving 'mountain people', as Hitler's regular entourage were known, and on a few military officers who spent time at his headquarters. After his final rows with Halder during the 1942 summer offensive in Russia, Hitler brought a team of Reichstag stenographers to his temporary HQ near Vinnitsa. They kept verbatim records of his military conferences and were also used to keep the table talk for posterity. The records of Hitler's ramblings became a permanent part of the Führer headquarters. They were brought back to the Wolf's Lair and eventually evacuated to Berlin in January 1945. On 22 April 1945, ten metal containers packed with transcripts were loaded on to a Ju 52 transport and flown out of Berlin, with another nine aircraft ferrying personnel to Bavaria. Within 24 hours, the last runway in Berlin was under fire by Soviet guns. The people escaped the doomed city, but the Ju 52 flown by Major Grundfinger was never seen again. Nor were the table talk transcripts.

Sellers of Nazi memorabilia have exploited the mystery, reporting finds of charred metal trunks — bulk paperwork can survive intense fires with little damage to the leaves in the middle. The prosaic explanation is that they were destroyed. Historian James O'Donnell conjured up a more suitable end, wondering if they had not been salvaged by some Bavarian farmer and used as bedding for animals. The bottom of a pigsty would seem the most deserved resting place for Hitler's nightly ruminations.



Above: Hitler presides over one of his bland luncheons. The food was unremittingly mediocre and of course, devoid of meat. Goebbels was an infrequent visitor to the Berghof, Hitler opting to keep their relationship on a strictly professional basis.

Below: Hitler is pictured taking his usual place in the tearoom at Berchtesgaden; the habitual end of his tedious afternoon walk. He had many compulsive disorders and was obsessed by routine.



Above: The surviving 'table-talks' provide a valuable insight into the working of Hitler's mind, in a way that a reading of *Mein Kampf* or any of his public utterances can not.

Below: Hitler at his headquarters after the 20 July assassination attempt. He is accompanied by his chronicler Bormann, Keitel and Goering.





'We conjure you: In the name of the shed blood of our children — take vengeance! Avenge our tortured mothers, avenge our profaned martyrs — take vengeance for us!'

Mordechai Tamaroff, Bialystok Ghetto, August 1943

Jewish Resistance



Above: Stills from a 8mm film made by a German who took part in dissolution of the ghettos. The footage was later used at the Nuremberg trials to convict Nazis of crimes against humanity.

Opposite page: Jewish partisans of the Vilna ghetto in Lithuania strike a defiant pose. Aware of the true meaning of the Nazi 'deportations', they resolved to die fighting rather than in the gas chambers.

Below: The insignia of the Judenrat. Many of the ghettos' leaders preferred to commit suicide than be involved in the deportation of their people, but the cooperation of other Jewish elders led to alienation between them and more radical youth movements.

RESISTANCE TO German occupation varied widely from country to country during Hitler's War. Once the seemingly invincible Nazi war machine faltered and the prospect of outright German victory faded, resistance gathered pace all over Europe. If it suited many participants to exaggerate the achievements of, say, the French resistance or the Russian partisan movement, the actions of the Jewish resistance have been largely overlooked. Indeed, some British and Russian prisoners-of-war caught up in the Holocaust recorded the passivity with which thousands of Jews apparently accepted their murder.

Yet there was a Jewish resistance. It emerged in the face of impossible odds, not just military but psychological. From its inception, the 'Final Solution' was disguised, hidden beneath a carapace of lies and euphemisms. It took several years to penetrate, to expose the full horror — something few people were prepared to believe at first — that a western nation state had embarked on a policy of genocide unprecedented in modern history.

FORMING GHETTOS

During 1941, the SS and SD began to concentrate the Jewish population of occupied Europe

in ghettos. First in Poland, then in Russia, pre-existing Jewish 'quarters' were flooded with Jewish families deported from rural areas or other countries. The ghettos were horrifically overcrowded, ten or twenty people to a room; there was no sanitation and next to no food. Himmler and Heydrich intended that malnutrition, hypothermia and disease would eventually provide their 'Final Solution', even in towns where the Jews were employed as forced labour, manufacturing equipment for the German army.

There was talk of 'resettling' all the Jews of Europe in Siberia, where they would die out. But with the Russian campaign far from won, extermination camps were established instead in Poland. Jews were taken from the ghettos to be murdered, by mass shootings and then in the gas chambers. However, such was the pace of the deportation programme that for a while at least, more Jews were still arriving in the ghettos than were leaving 'for resettlement'.

Because the ghettos were isolated from each other, and movement between them theoretically impossible, news of what 'resettlement' really meant was slow to travel. Between June and November 1941 some 47,000 Jews were taken from the Vilna ghetto, allegedly to a labour camp

at Ponar, 20 miles away, where they were working in German factories. But at the end of the year, a living skeleton crept back into the ghetto. Sara Menkes, 19, had been among one contingent. When they arrived at Ponar, the Jews were forced to strip before being machine-gunned in pits. The bullets missed her and she lay for a day under a heap of corpses and earth before struggling free.

THE JUDENRAT

Ghettos were administered internally by councils of Jews, community leaders who tried to make the best of a very bad job indeed. They oversaw the rationing of what food could be stolen or traded. When the Germans demanded another thousand Jews for 'resettlement', it fell to the *Judenrat* to select them. Councils that failed to cooperate would themselves be on the next lorry — or were summarily shot, with their families. The *Judenrat* in Vilna did not believe Sara Menkes, although the idealistic members



of a Zionist youth movement did, and spread the news.

The division between 'elders' trying to deal with the German authorities and young men and women ready to fight was to be repeated in ghetto after ghetto. Even once the hideous reality of 'resettlement' was exposed for what it was, the threat of German reprisals acted as a powerful brake on resistance activities. In ghettos like Krakow, where the Jews were



Right: Despite increasing awareness of the fate that awaited them after deportation, most people living in the ghettos did not encourage resistance. This woman is unwillingly being led to her death by other Jewish victims.

Below: During the dissolution of the ghettos some did resist, but the vast majority were captured by the overwhelming numbers of SS soldiers dispatched to carry out the liquidations. These people were shot on the spot – perhaps an easier fate than the gas chambers awaiting those who travelled in the trains to camps such as Auschwitz.

Bottom: Those found to be involved in any kind of resistance movement were summarily hung to discourage others from following their example. The Jewish woman hanging is Masha Brusinka who was caught smuggling false documents to a prison camp for Soviet POWs.



working in factories producing German military uniforms, the idea that the Nazis intended to massacre them was hard to believe. Why slaughter people you had made into slaves to support your war effort? It made no sense. Why resist and trigger certain retribution when cooperation might buy survival? In several ghettos the community became divided between a majority that sought to deal with the Germans and a minority that was itself split between the secular (the Communist resistance) and the ultra religious (Zionist activists).

ODDS AGAINST

Resistance requires at least the tacit support of the population. For the Jews, isolated in the ghettos, the surrounding countryside was often hostile. The arrival of the Germans in the Baltic states had inspired vicious pogroms and many local people had subsequently volunteered for the 'security' battalions of the SD, if not the *Einsatzgruppen* themselves. Anti-semitism was rife in pre-war Poland and trainloads of Jews en route for Auschwitz were sometimes taunted by local children who knew why the crematoria

chimneys smoked day and night. Jews on the move between ghettos were betrayed so often that it could cost the lives of a dozen volunteers to get a message to another ghetto.

The heroic history of the Polish Home Army is blemished with a number of incidents whereby Jewish resistance operations were betrayed to the Germans. The Home Army in Warsaw, itself to be wiped out in the Polish rising, refused to shelter some of the Jews that escaped the destruction of the ghetto by crawling through the sewers. On the other hand, Home Army units around Lublin and Kovno did cooperate with the Jewish resistance and coordinated action against the Germans.

OLD VS YOUNG

Within Jewish communities, the division between elders and activists were there for the Germans to exploit. The resistance in the Vilna ghetto received guns and grenades, smuggled in by the nuns at the Benedictine convent of St Catherine. In the winter of 1942 they used the sewers to slip out of the ghetto and blow up the Vilna-Moscow railway line, a

crucial German communications route. But the Germans caught and tortured a resistance member. They learned the name of the resistance leader and demanded the *Judenrat* surrender him. If they did not, the whole community would be slaughtered.

In a scene that was to be repeated in several ghettos, Jewish resistance teams found themselves drawing guns on their own people. Itzik Wittenberg's men said they were ready to shoot, but he ordered them to disperse and reorganize. He surrendered to a grisly fate at the hands of the Gestapo. A few months later, the nuns were betrayed too and hanged for sheltering fugitive Jews.

ARMING FOR THE FIGHT

Weapons were in desperately short supply, which limited the possibilities of resistance. However, in Krakow, a handful of Zionist activists sold some of the medicines smuggled into the ghetto by Oskar Schindler and bought weapons on the black market. Raids mounted outside the ghetto were successful enough for the SS to send Dirlwanger's battalion to 'pacify' the area, which it did with great brutality.

The Dnepropetrovsk ghetto received 150 kg of dynamite from the Ukrainian partisans, which it put to good use. Chaim Yellin's communists and Malachi Wald's Zionists operated in German uniforms (made in the Kovno ghetto) to blow up buildings used by German officers on leave and a naval ordnance depot at Lepaya. At Riga, Lodz and Sonsnowiecz Jewish resistance groups blew up the railway tracks on which the German war effort depended.

By the time the ghettos were cleared, the Jews knew what awaited them and there was less opposition to acts of resistance. The ghettos at Kovno, Bialystok and Warsaw all resisted their elimination, desperate groups of starving people with a handful of weapons against SS battlegroups.

The end was preordained, but at least the resistance took some of the SS with them. Mordechai Tamaroff's plea for vengeance, voiced as the Bialystok ghetto was massacred, would be taken up after the war.

FINAL CRY

There was even resistance in the extermination camps. On 2 August 1943 there was a revolt at Treblinka, organized by Dr Julian Chorazya, a Polish medical officer who went to his death in the gas chamber without betraying the plan he had recruited so many others to put into action. Groups of Jews overran guard posts to seize weapons. The SS quashed the revolt, but 117 guards were killed or wounded. Over a thousand Jews were killed that afternoon; fewer than 200 escaped to the nearby woods, but 18 made it to the partisans.

A rising at Auschwitz-Birkenau was planned in autumn 1944. It was supposed to be coordinated with local partisans who would attack the camp from the outside as the revolt began. The *sonderkommando* of some 600 Jewish slave workers used to clear out the gas chambers was to play a key role. They had planted explosives in several of the crematorium buildings, intended to blow them up during the rising.

AUSCHWITZ RIOT

On 26 October, the *sonderkommando* discovered that the Germans planned to gas most of them that day and replace them with fresh 'volunteers'. They rioted, blew up three crematoria and attacked the guards. The premature revolt was underway, a few smuggled pistols and sub-machine guns enabling them to seize more guns from the SS. But there was no supporting assault from outside the wire. About 30 SS men were killed. Over 1,000 inmates died and only a few succeeded in getting far enough away to elude the dog teams that searched the surrounding area afterwards.

GUERRILLA WAR

IN THE WOODS and swamps of eastern Poland and Russia, some Jewish resistance bands stayed in the field throughout the German occupation. Their numbers were small, but significant enough for their representatives to ask the Red Army Partisan high command that they be recognised as the 'Jewish National Army'. (The Russians had already established a 'Polish National Army' under their operational control.) More than 500 Jewish fighters had won medals in the ranks of the Russian partisans. Stalin rejected the idea, however, and incorporated the Jewish guerrilla forces into the Red Army partisans as the frontline rolled westwards.



Above: Resistance fighters tended to be young and single. Guerrilla warfare was extremely dangerous and these young fighters must have been painfully aware of the odds against their survival.

Below right: Egon Nowak (left) and Oskar Wertheimer (third left) were prominent Jewish partisans in the Slovak National Uprising 1944



Above Left: Candidates of both sexes fought bravely in harsh conditions and with limited supplies. In some areas they could not even rely on support from locals since anti-semitism was rife in Eastern Europe.

Below: Partisan Boris Yochai plants dynamite on a railroad track near Vilna. In total he was responsible for blowing up twelve trains.





NAZI CORRUPTION

Hitler came to power vowing to sweep away the decadence of the Weimar Republic. But once in control, the Nazis soon proved the maxim that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

CORRUPTION permeated the byzantine structure of the Third Reich. Though junior officials of the Party were subject to scrutiny and sometimes even prosecution, the most senior of Hitler's henchmen remained untouchable.

Hitler liked to portray himself

as a puritan aesthete – and in truth his tastes were relatively simple. But in reality, Hitler was a rich man. The sales of *Mein Kampf* ensured that. His home for much of his time in power – the Berghof at Berchtesgaden – was developed into a luxury estate at the expense of the nation. Later, Hitler dismembered the art collections of occupied

Europe for his own use.

The public image of, *Reichsmarschall* Herman Goering by contrast, appeared to make a virtue of excess. His bulk and bonhomie as well as his record as a World War I fighter ace made him a human and very popular Nazi leader before the war. He drew the salaries of Prime Minister of Prussia,

Commissioner for the Four-Year-Plan, Minister of the Air, Speaker of the Reichstag, Marshal of the Luftwaffe, and National Hunt Master. In addition he held directorships and shares in many major enterprises, including the *Essener Nationalzeitung* and other newspapers, the Reichswerke Hermann Goering, the Daimler-Benz and BMW



companies as well as in numerous aircraft firms

Goering also profited from the expropriation of Jewish property as well as from the looting of galleries and collections from all over Europe. His second marriage to Emmy Sonnemann in Berlin Cathedral was as extravagant as an Hohenzollern royal wedding. It was paid for in part by a deduction from the wages of all the thousands of ministerial employees in Goering's empire.

RHINO-WHIPPING

In any discussion of corruption in the Third Reich, Julius Streicher, the editor of the crude anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, is in a class of his own. He founded *Der Stürmer* in 1923, and filled it with cartoons, stories of ritual murder, pornography and letters denouncing Jews. An editorial even announced the discovery that Christ was not a Jew. Although Streicher aroused feelings of loathing in many people, his followers were fanatical in their devotion. Hitler was an avid reader of *Der Stürmer*.

Streicher derived sexual gratification from horsewhipping political prisoners, a practice he admitted in his public speeches. After he had whipped Professor Steinrück in his cell, using a rhinoceros-hide whip, he joined a party at the Deutsche Hof and stated contentedly to fellow guests "I feel a great sense of release." Streicher visited Dachau where he extracted confessions from prisoners about their sexual fantasies. Juvenile delinquents held on remand were also questioned in detail about their masturbatory practices.

He was a brutal and unpredictable man and by 1939 his behaviour had become so extreme that Hitler imposed a *Redeverbot* or 'Speaking Ban' on him. The final straw had been his claim that Goering's daughter Edda had been conceived by artificial insemination.

Streicher gave his favourite mistress Anni Seitz a gold jewel

case made from the melted down wedding rings of the officers of the Gau of Franconia. He rationalised the confiscation by deriding men who wore wedding rings as effeminate.

MEDIEVAL POTENTATE

Although Goering was the outstanding example of men who used their Party eminence to amass wealth, he had his emulators, including Hans Frank who as Governor of Poland lived like a medieval potentate.

Among the most notable of all of Goering's rivals was Robert Ley. Ley, who had been Gauleiter of Cologne from 1928 to 1932, led the 'committee of action for the protection of German labour' which on 2 May 1933 occupied trade union offices and imprisoned its officers. Ley then became the head of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, the Nazi labour organisation which replaced the unions. The DAF, an extra-governmental organisation, was never subject to financial scrutiny which gave Ley and his cronies enormous scope for fraud.

With his violent anti-Semitism, alcoholism and vulgar ostentation, Robert Ley exemplified the coarse, corrupt face of Nazism. He was known behind his back as the *Reichstrunkenbold* or 'State Drunkard in Chief', a nickname that parodied the official titles used by Nazi leaders. Another contender for this nickname was 'Professor' Heinrich Hoffman, Hitler's official photographer and art expert.

DRINKING BOUTS

Heavy drinking was a widely accepted and recognised form of self-indulgence by senior Nazis and many were alcoholics. The annual celebrations by the *Alte Kämpfer*, Hitler's old comrades from the early Nazi days, were always opportunities for gross drinking sessions. At the 1936 *Parteitag*, Albert Speer used massed army searchlights to create the *Lichterdom* – the Dome of Light. In the penumbra below



Above: Julius Streicher epitomised the ideological corruption of Nazi Germany. His paper *Der Stürmer* was condemned by many but held a hypnotic power over a few including the Führer.

Opposite Page: Hermann Goering's wedding to his second wife Emmy was a lavish affair paid for in part by the involuntary contributions of his staff. It was typical of his love of all things extravagant.

it the collected ranks of the *Alte Kämpfer* marched past. Their fat buttocks and beer bellies bulging against their brown shirts passed unseen by the audience.

Party officials and *Alte Kämpfer* were diligent collectors for *Winterhilfe*. 'Winter Relief' was an annual charity organised to help the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* – the Nazi People's Welfare Organisation. Originally obtained through street collections, contributions to *Winterhilfe* were later deducted directly from wages. This bid to limit corruption failed to change the cynical view of many

Germans, who felt that rather than helping the needy, much of the money collected disappeared straight into the bottomless pockets of Nazi officials. If such a one was seen in a new car, passers-by were known to say, "There goes the Winter Relief."

JEWISH PLUNDER

Bribery and blackmail offered huge scope for corruption to minor officials, but the confiscation of Jewish property was even more profitable. Furniture, clothing, paintings and jewellery were in theory meant to be auctioned after a property and



Above & Above Right: Albert Speer ingeniously created the Lichtturm at Nuremberg rallies to distract attention from the ageing Alte Kämpfer. By 1936, the old Nazi guard had grown fat on their privileges.



Above: These GIs of the 3rd US Army were responsible for salvaging works of art that had been stolen by the Nazis. Manet's 'Conservatory' had been stored in the pits of Kaiseroda in Thuringia with other classics.



Right: No one was safe: even this man out skiing is expected to contribute to Winterhilfe. Later, donations were taken directly from salaries to limit the 'skimming' of public donations by Party officials.

its owner's possessions had been Aryanised. In reality, senior Gestapo, Party or SS officials had first pickings, and auction prices were fixed to enable them to buy items at a fraction of their real value.

When Alsace was officially absorbed into the Greater German Reich in 1940, the Bürger Hospital in Strasbourg was compelled to accept one Herr Lemke from Freiburg as its administrative director. Lemke diverted the hospital's food supplies to the black market and used service cars for amorous joy rides. He regularly wined and dined his mistress, the wife of a soldier serving in the East, in a hospital sick room that had been

converted into a private sitting room.

FAILING ECONOMY

Corruption also served to undermine the Reich's war economy. Germany would probably have succumbed to the Allies in early 1944 without the efficient and zealous intervention of Albert Speer promoted Minister for Armaments from 1942. Even so, at the time of the Allied invasion of Normandy, many German vehicles in France were immobilised, not through air attack, but because their fuel had been sold on the black market.

As the war ground down the German economy and with so many men at the front, goods and

services became a more attractive commodity than money with which to trade. One labour camp commandant received one packet of cigarettes for every male foreign worker and half for every female that he provided for a local Gasthaus owner, whose bombed premises needed labourers for its reconstruction.

The puritanical *Reichsführer*-SS Heinrich Himmler attempted to purge some of the more gross elements of corruption in the SS when he appointed Dr Konrad Morgen, an assistant SS judge, to investigate irregularities in Concentration Camp administration. Part of Dr Morgen's brief was to ensure that no brutality took place. He also

investigated theft by SS guards and officers.

HIMMLER'S PURGES

Investigating Belzec, Maidanek, Sobibor and Treblinka, Dr Morgen returned 800 cases of corruption and murder. In 1943 he discovered that *Standartenführer* Karl Koch, the commandant of Buchenwald, had embezzled Rm 100,000 and falsified documents and concealed murders. On evidence provided by Dr Morgen in 1944, Koch was subject to an *SS-Gericht* or Court. Charged with embezzlement, insubordination and the illegal killing of two prisoners, he was found guilty and hanged early in 1945.

CONNING A NATION

Using confiscated union funds, Robert Ley set up the *Kraft durch Freude* - KdF or 'Strength through Joy' organisation

Membership of the movement included the chance to buy a People's Car or Volkswagen by weekly or monthly subscriptions. It was widely suspected that when war began and the Volkswagen program was cancelled for the duration, Ley pocketed the workers' contributions of Reichsmark (Rm) 100 million for the cars.

There were numerous cases of corruption and fraud by DAF officials who administered KdF programmes at all levels. Their behaviour was so blatant that workers suggested with bitter humour that the initials KdF actually stood for *Kind durch Freund* - 'Child by a Friend' or *Kotz durchs Fenster* - 'Vomit through the Window'.

Below: Behind his back, people used to say of Robert Ley - head of the KdF enterprise - that he took his joy through other people's strength.

Bottom right: Members of the KdF celebrate the fifth anniversary of the organisation in July 1938. The costume designs were prompted by the bogus Nazi belief in teutonic medievalism.



Above: Hitler, with the Reichsführer in the back seat, enjoys his 49th birthday present on 20th April 1938. Hitler was one of the cherished few to take delivery of a KdF Wagen which was intended to introduce affordable motoring to the masses. Instead the car was a stunning example of the Nazis cynical manipulation of the public. A 100,000 workers had made prepayments on the VWs. None received either the car or a refund.



Up until December 1941, the revitalised German army carried all before it. The preceding years of stunning victories were due as much to the command deficiencies of their opponents as to German weaponry and tactics.



Blitzkrieg IN ACTION

Blitzkrieg had a relatively short lifespan, but its impact and effects produced nothing short of a military and historical revolution.

BLITZKRIEG DID not appear out of thin air to paralyse the armies of Poland and the west. Its origins lay in the last years of World War I and in the writings of lonely military voices

between the wars.

Through a series of rapid and sharp campaigns the German army was able to demonstrate to the whole world that it was master of a new form of warfare. Blitzkrieg enabled the Wehrmacht to overcome the enervating

attrition strategies of World War I, and to humble enemy after enemy at minimum cost to the German nation and at maximum cost to its opponents.

The roots of Blitzkrieg lay in the German infiltration tactics of 1918. Special assault divisions with heavily-armed 'Storm Troopers' broke through weak points in the Allied lines. The troops carried heavy loads of grenades, machine guns and trench mortars, giving them superior firepower at the point of contact. They were supported by precision artillery fire and ground attack aircraft. Isolated pockets of defenders were dealt with by follow-up units: the storm troopers raged on through the Allied rear areas. By the end of May, however, the German infantrymen were tiring, German supply lines were breaking down, and superior Allied numbers began to tell. Ultimately

Ludendorff's offensives were thrown back.

After the war, a few military theorists realised that armoured vehicles would add an extra dimension to the new German tactics. Most armies in the 1920s saw tanks purely as a means of supporting the infantry, but men like Liddell Hart, Fuller and Martel advocated the establishment of a much more mobile armoured force for use in future wars.

MOBILE WARFARE

By dint of influence, persuasion and the use of a series of essays and books, they managed to establish a British 'Experimental Mechanised Force' by the late 1920s. Although immediately successful, this advanced experiment was unable to survive long in a period of financial austerity. But the point was well taken elsewhere,



especially in Germany.

British theories regarding a balanced armoured force were examined in great detail by the Truppenamt, the clandestine General Staff of the Reichswehr. One of the most important of the officers involved was Colonel Heinz Guderian. Guderian took the ideas of Liddell Hart, Martel and Fuller and expanded them, proposing that any future armoured force had to be a balance of all arms, with the main striking force being provided by a highly mobile spearhead of tanks, mechanised infantry and artillery.

PRUSSIAN RESISTANCE

Guderian had to fight some opposition within the German army, but a large part of the General Staff looked on his ideas with favour. When the Nazis came to power, he found an even greater supporter in Hitler, who encouraged the efforts of the panzer troops at every stage. As a result, he was able to put some of his ideas into practice as the first postwar German tank formations were formed in 1934.

In a manual written soon afterwards, the function of the

new German panzer arm was defined as the creation of "rapid concentrations of considerable fighting power, obtaining quick decisions by breakthroughs, deep penetration on wide fronts and the destruction of the enemy". This policy was being advocated at a time when other armies were still slowing their armour to move at the pace of the marching soldier. The Germans reversed the notion, preferring to increase the speed of their spearhead infantry, initially by carrying them on trucks and later by mounting them in specialized half-tracks.

Although the tanks were to be the spearhead, the first panzers were primarily training and familiarisation machines. They were small, and lightly armed and armoured, and had definite tactical limitations; production of better designs was slow and expensive. But they were highly mobile, which was vital since speed was the essence of the newly emerging concept of Blitzkrieg.

RAPID CONCENTRATION

Blitzkrieg is simple enough in



Right: Blitzkrieg depended upon good military intelligence and speed for its success. Light reconnaissance units probed an enemy's weak points which were then attacked by overwhelming forces.

Panzer IIs in the field in Poland in 1940. Light tanks formed the backbone of the panzerwaffe in the early Blitzkrieg campaigns.



HITLER'S THIRD REICH 15



Above: The key to the success of Blitzkrieg was in the flexible use of all arms: the tanks were supported by mobile artillery, the Luftwaffe, and by mechanised infantry called panzergrenadiers by the German army.

Below: With many different units operating over a wide area, good communications were vital. All Panzers were equipped with radios, but specialised command tanks with extra gear were also used.



theory. Using the newly-formed panzer divisions, the German army was able to form an overwhelming offensive spearhead at a pre-selected point or points on a battlefield.

This point, known as the *schwerpunkt*, was carefully chosen using all available intelligence and reconnaissance resources. Aerial reconnaissance provided an overall picture, while ground reconnaissance troops mounted on motorcycles with armoured cars in support were used to gather tactical information. Using radio, in itself a novel technique in the years up to 1940, these troops reported where the enemy's strengths and weaknesses lay.

THE ATTACK

Once the attack point had been selected, usually where the enemy was weakest, the panzers massed and then advanced under a rain of supporting fire supplied by artillery and dive-bombers. By

sheer force of impact and shock tactics, the panzers moved forward with the mechanised infantry providing flank security. Enemy strongpoints were avoided by the panzers and isolated by the mechanised troops, to be reduced by follow-up units advancing on foot.

CLOSE SUPPORT

Once the armour was clear of the immediate breakthrough point, further support was provided by the guns of the tanks themselves and the innovative use of dive-bombers to crush any immediate resistance.

It was at this point that the full impact of the new Blitzkrieg was felt. The mobility and firepower of the tanks enabled them to range far and wide in the enemy's rear areas, disrupting communications and interrupting supplies. By creating such havoc the panzers destroyed the ability of the enemy to fight an organised battle.



Schwerpunkt!

THE FUNDAMENTAL GOAL within German offensive doctrine was to encircle and destroy the enemy using fire and movement. To that end the various combat arms were brought together against the enemy to cause surprise whilst also generating superiority in force and firepower. The German military were the first to realise that even the most formidable force is never sufficient to gain decisive superiority over an entire front. Therefore a point of main effort – a *Schwerpunkt* – was selected for a breakthrough, and only narrow sectors were assigned to the attacking units. Factors that determined where the *Schwerpunkt* was included weaknesses in the enemy's position, useable approach routes to enable follow-up forces to get into action quickly – preferably without the enemy knowing – and the suitability of the terrain for tanks and mechanised forces. Although the bulk of forces were massed at the *Schwerpunkt*, other sectors of the front would also be engaged by diversionary forces. Furthermore, although a particular point of maximum effort was selected in advance, the Germans were adaptable enough to be able to shift a main effort if the resistance encountered was unexpectedly strong.



Above and below: The German attack through the Ardennes was a model application of the *Schwerpunkt* technique. The French regarded the thickly wooded region of the Ardennes as being impossible for tanks to manoeuvre through, and as a result that sector of the front was thinly held. Preceded by aerial and conventional artillery and parachute drops, German units were across the River Meuse in 24 hours – the French high command thought that it would take a week.



Top and above: Following the panzers, mobilised infantry continued to press home the advantage. They surrounded and reduced pockets of resistance and prevented counter-attacks from forming.

Right: When Guderian's panzers burst into the open at Sedan, they hit the junction between Huntziger's Second Army and Corap's Ninth Army, where French co-ordination was at its weakest. On 15 May 1940, as the French army fell into panic, the Panzers flooded out into France, preceded by a cloud of screaming Stukas.



Components of Blitzkrieg

AS LATE AS 1942, the US Army analysis of German offensive doctrine was that its primary aim was to encircle the enemy and destroy him. "The objective of the combined arms in attack" a staff paper concluded, "is to bring the armored forces and the infantry into decisive action against the enemy with sufficient firepower and shock. Superiority in force and firepower, the employment of armored forces, as well as the surprise element, play a great part in the offensive."

The truth was very different. German tactics did everything they could to avoid a decisive engagement, relying on speed and flexibility to wreak havoc in enemy rear areas. The fact that the Germans were inevitably the aggressors allowed them to pick the point of attack, and they were helped by the fact that their opponents in the first three years of war were much less organised than the Wehrmacht.

The Germans substituted mobility for power, which meant that all the supporting arms had to move at the same speed as the tanks. Although the bulk German army was still largely horse drawn, the panzer divisions which raced through France in 1940 were entirely motorised – infantry and support units were carried on trucks. The opening phases of any attacks were meticulously planned and executed, while in later stages the high command relied on the excellent training of their troops, good communications, and panic and paralysis on the part of enemy commanders.



RECONNAISSANCE

Above: A typical panzer division in 1940 had one reconnaissance battalion equipped with 100 armoured cars and 60 motorcycles. Although the division's motorcycle infantry battalion was classed as motorised infantry, its 500 motorcyclists could also be used for reconnaissance.

MOTORISED INFANTRY

Left: In 1940, the panzer division's panzergrenadier brigade had two regiments each of two battalions – approximately 2,500 men. All were vehicle-mounted: the standard divisional table of organisation called for some 1400 trucks, and over 500 lighter vehicles.

COMMUNICATIONS

Right: Every German division had a Nachrichten or signals battalion on strength. It was tasked with maintaining both telephone and wireless communications.



With the enemy unable to respond or to make meaningful countermoves, the panzers were then free to advance over hitherto impossible distances and towards distant objectives within periods of days rather than the months of previous campaigns. As they moved, the tanks retained the support of the mechanised infantry. If airborne landings by paratroops or glider units could be used as well, so much the better, for the overall impact on the enemy would be that much amplified. As the deep advances into the enemy rear continued, marching infantry could assume the roles of guarding the flanks and preventing counterthrusts on the German lines of.

Put in such simple terms, the

art of Blitzkrieg sounds all too easy. But in reality it was anything but simple. It called for a very high level of cooperation, not only between the constituent arms but also between the army and the Luftwaffe, for in the absence of self-propelled artillery the Junkers Ju 87 Stuka had to be used. This called for a degree of interservice cooperation unknown in many other nations. But by 1939 the Germans had been able to train and practice such tactics to the point where they were almost routine.

COORDINATION

By 1939 the Wehrmacht had plenty of experience in the mass movement of troops – having learned many lessons in the

bloodless occupations of Austria, the Sudetenland and the rest of Czechoslovakia. These 'dress rehearsals' for war revealed many shortcomings in German organisation and equipment, but these had been ironed out by the time Blitzkrieg had its baptism of fire in September 1939.

The tactics used in the campaign against Poland in 1939 enabled the Germans to strike hard and deep. It was not a true Blitzkrieg – in fact, it was a classic double encirclement. But the speed and power of the German strikes was decisive, and the Poles were beaten in a matter of weeks.

In spite of the success of the Polish campaign, the Germans recognised a number of

shortcomings. The majority of the tanks used were lightweight Panzer Is and IIs, eked out by a number of Czech tanks which proved to be excellent except for their lack of heavy armament. The shortage of mechanised infantry was often felt, and while artillery support was usually provided when called for, the vast bulk of the equipment available was still horse-drawn and too slow to follow up the rapid advances of the panzers.

INTO POLAND

Such problems had been corrected by May 1940. In the campaign against France, Blitzkrieg tactics ensured that Germany's ancient enemy was humbled and defeated as no nation had been defeated for



PANZERS

Above: In 1939 a panzer division operated with two tank regiments each of two battalions. However, in order to bring the light divisions up to full panzer strength, most lost one of their regiments before the invasion of France. This brought the number of panzers in a division down from 324 in 1939 to around 250 in 1940.

COMMAND

Left: Panzer divisions and corps were controlled by fully mobile headquarters units, which enabled senior officers to command on the move. As a result generals like Heinz Guderian tended to operate much closer to the front than their Allied equivalents.

AIR SUPPORT

Right: Troops could not call for air support directly: requests were passed to a Luftwaffe liaison officer at division who passed them on to the relevant Luftflotte.



centuries. After an unexpected attack through the Ardennes, avoiding the formidable defences of the Maginot line, the panzers fell on the static French units around Sedan. Leaving aside all the conventional military approaches to warfare the panzers struck deep through France, and in a series of rapid moves defeated the Belgians, the French and finally forced the British off the continent.

In North Africa, the desert campaigns revealed that Blitzkrieg methods would work only as long as the forces involved could keep moving. Once they came to a halt, either from enemy action or by outrunning fuel and logistics support, 'conventional' tactics came into play and the

whole Blitzkrieg cycle had to be reestablished, not always under favourable circumstances.

This fact was underlined in 1941 when the German army finally over-reached its abilities with the advance into the Soviet Union. Operation 'Barbarossa' at first had fantastic successes as the panzers moved deep and wide into the USSR, capturing whole armies and cities along with the equipment and supplies to maintain armies in the field for years.

DEFEATED BY DISTANCE

But the sheer size of the landscape swallowed up all the advances. The limited capacity of the Germans to maintain their momentum over great distances

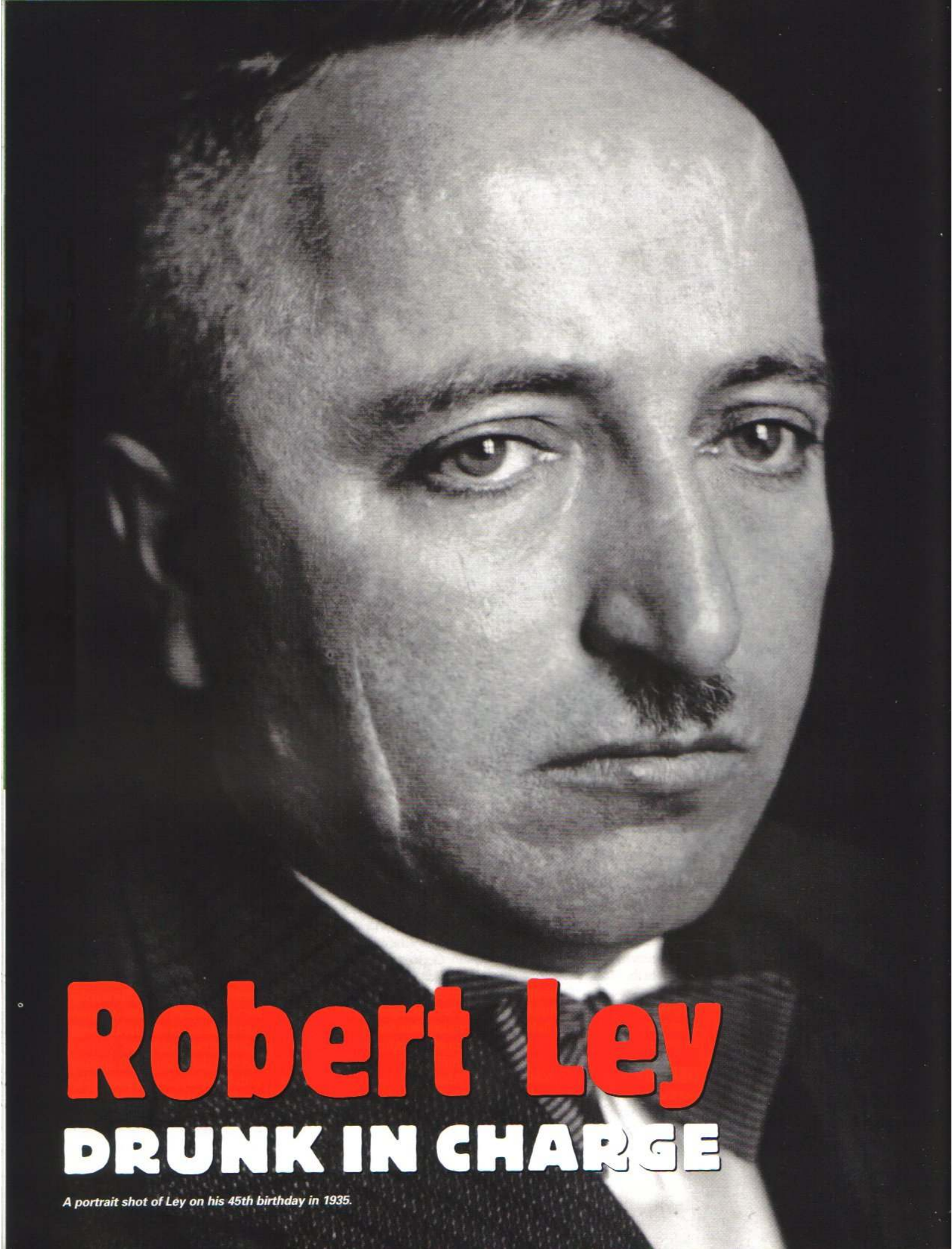
was not up to the challenge of Russian winter.

The better weather in the spring of 1942 again set the power of the panzer units into action and they rolled forward once more. Great advances and victories were achieved, but it was all for nothing. By the end of the year an entire German army was embroiled in Stalingrad, the desert advances in North Africa had been brought to a halt and Germany was finally feeling the strain of attempting to maintain the initiative.

After 1942, balanced armoured formations continued to be the norm in all armies, but the heady successes of the Blitzkrieg era were rarely repeated. Germany's enemies adopted German tactics,

using mobile striking power to take on the panzers on their own terms. They too were able to strike back with equal force and impact, and greater numbers eventually began to tell.

While the tank continued to form the main striking force on the battlefield it was never able to regain the overall dominance it achieved between 1939 and 1941. Even so, the effects of Blitzkrieg are with us still. Armies still move into battle in forces that are evenly balanced between tanks, mechanised infantry and artillery, with close support supplied by a rapidly-responding air arm. Properly applied, in suitable terrain, Blitzkrieg tactics are still highly effective; as graphically shown in the 1991 Gulf War.



Robert Ley

DRUNK IN CHARGE

A portrait shot of Ley on his 45th birthday in 1935.



Ley was sadly typical of the Nazi ruling elite. A die-hard anti-semitite and habitual drunkard, he used his power to build up a massive personal fortune.

ROBERT LEY was another talent-less mediocrity among the Nazi Old Guard. Like Hess, he followed Hitler with dog-like devotion. There was never any danger he might think or act for himself. His survival in office, even after he was completely discredited, was typical of Hitler's reciprocal faith in his 'old fighters'. Not that Ley had any fight left in him after the First World War.

Born in 1890 at Niederbreidenbach in the Rhineland, Ley was the son of a wealthy farmer. In later years, he would pretend his parents were poor peasants, and wax lyrical on the ennobling dignity of labour. However, since he was able to attend university, achieving a doctorate in chemistry, there must have been money in the family. His peasant origins were as bogus as von Ribbentrop's nobility.

CHRONIC ALCOHOLIC

Ley was recalled to the army in 1914, having completed his national service, and fought as an infantryman before transferring to the German army air corps. In 1917 he was shot down over the French lines, wounded and taken prisoner. He was not repatriated until 1920.

He found work with German



Above: Ley with his Führer in 1934 greeting some of the workers who were so cynically manipulated by the regime. The Reichorganisationsleiter remained one of Hitler's most loyal supporters.

chemical giant I G Farben, but his experiences in the war had left him with a chronic drink problem. He was eventually fired for habitual drunkenness. In 1925 Ley joined the Nazi party and became *Gauleiter* for Rhineland-South. Again, he had to have had some private income even then, as the party could not afford to pay its full-time officials. He was elected to the Prussian Landtag in the 1928 elections. In 1930 he was elected to the Reichstag.

MASSIVE CORRUPTION

By 1932 Ley had wormed his way up to be a *Landesinspekteur*, or senior *Gauleiter*. He published a party newspaper, the *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, a shrewd combination of Nazi propaganda and salacious gossip that made him a handsome profit. It also boosted his standing with Hitler, under whose spell he had completely fallen.

From his elevation to Chancellor in 1933, Hitler began to distance himself from the socialist ideas that had formed part of the Nazi platform. A reckoning with the labour unions, staunch supporters of the socialist SPD or Communist KP parties, was not long in coming.

Below: Ley in jovial mood at a fund raising rally for the Nazi Winterhilfe (winter relief) charity. He had reason to be cheerful; drawing fraudulently on the funds of the DAF, the largest mass organisation in the Reich.



On 2 May, Ley led a nationwide operation in which union offices were occupied by the 'committee of action for the protection of German labour'. In a matter of days 169 different trade unions were taken under Nazi control. On 10 May, the party established the DAF (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*): an all embracing national union that included white-collar workers and management associations. Hitler was determined to end class-based antagonism between workers and management: he wanted to

engender a *Volksgemeinschaft* ('peoples community') in which the German Volk strove together to restore the nation to greatness. As Ley explained in a press interview, to Hitler, socialism in the Third Reich was everything that served the interests of the German people. "Workers!" he proclaimed, "your institutions are sacred and unassailable to us National Socialists. I myself am a poor son of peasants and have known poverty. I swear to you that we shall not only preserve everything you have, we shall



Above: Ley accompanies the Duke and Duchess of Windsor on their ill-advised tour of Germany in October 1937. In the area of social etiquette the Nazi leaders were often out of their depth. But Ley's boorish behaviour plumbed new lows.

Below: Ley (centre) at a Hitler Youth function in 1940. During the war, Ley enjoyed the benefits of office to the full. He became the focus of discontent with the regime following his public descent into alcoholism.



Above: Ley continued to appear in public, addressing mass meetings of the party faithful during the war, but his drunken ramblings were a public relations disaster.

extend the rights of the worker in order that he might enter the new National Socialist state as an equal and respected member of the nation."

By 1935 Dr Ley presided over a gigantic organization that represented the entire German work force: 20 million people. The DAF was active in many fields, achieving considerable success. It subsidised low wage earners, funded workers' education and, in the shape of the 'Strength through Joy' (*Kraft durch Freude*) movement, provided working families with a taste of tourism. The Nazis invented the package holiday. With a budget of 24 million marks in 1933-34, 'Strength through Joy' was a big business in its own right, eventually operating two ocean liners and a string of holiday apartment complexes on the Baltic coast.

Just as Hitler tolerated Ernst Röhm's homosexuality until it suited him to be affronted, Ley's alcoholism was regarded as a joke, but not sufficient cause for

his removal. Tales of his drunkenness were so commonplace that he was soon known as the *Reichstrunkenbold* (Reich Drunk Master). He had a stutter that worsened under the influence of drink, which amused the abstemious Führer who took to mimicking Dr Ley to his inner circle at the Berghof.

WIFE-BEATER

Ley had destroyed his first marriage through his drinking. As his condition worsened, his cruelty to his second wife became an open secret among the Nazi hierarchy. Inge Ley was equally devoted to Hitler and there were two schools of thought as to what finally drove her to suicide. Some said she was another of those women in love with the Führer and unable to accept his entrenched celibacy. Others had seen Ley rip her clothes off in front of his drinking companions. On one occasion, he returned home, oozing drunken bonhomie, and stripped her naked to show

UNION BASHING



Above: Hitler makes a triumphal appearance at the 1934 May rally honouring the German worker. Behind the scenes, the Nazis were doing their utmost to destroy the hard-won rights of the working class. On 2 May 1933, Ley had formed the German Labour Front (DAF), which on 24 October replaced the outlawed trade unions. As a sop to the workers he then set up the Kraft durch Freude organisation, described by William Shirer as a "gigantic fraud".

Right: Robert Ley at Dachau in 1936. To his immediate left stands Theodor Eicke, who established the first Nazi concentration camp outside Munich. The main occupants of the camps in the 1930s were political opponents of the regime, including communists and trade union leaders.



his pals just how fit she was. "He'll kill me one day," she told her audience.

In 1937 the former king of England, Edward VIII, now entitled the Duke of Windsor, visited Germany to see for himself the condition of the workers. In his short reign, he had won himself something of a reputation as a friend of the workers, although trousers and tie knots remained his main pre-occupation. As head of the DAF, Ley would preside over the visit. Unfortunately, he was verging on insanity, even by Nazi standards. He had installed his young Estonian mistress into his mansion and embarked on a heroic drinking spree that would last until his death. Even in his

rare moments of sobriety, he was fairly incoherent.

Unlike most of the Nazi leadership, Ley preferred to drive himself rather than let the chauffeur take the wheel. He loved his powerful Mercedes-Benz. He drove the Windsors to visit workers' accommodation near Munich, a purpose-built barracks at a new factory, but drove straight through the gates before anyone had a chance to open them. Panicking Nazi officials wired Hitler's office and Hermann Göring was despatched to take charge before Ley killed Germany's famous visitors. The interaction between these towering snobs and the drunken Nazi must have been a sight to behold. Göring was of course in

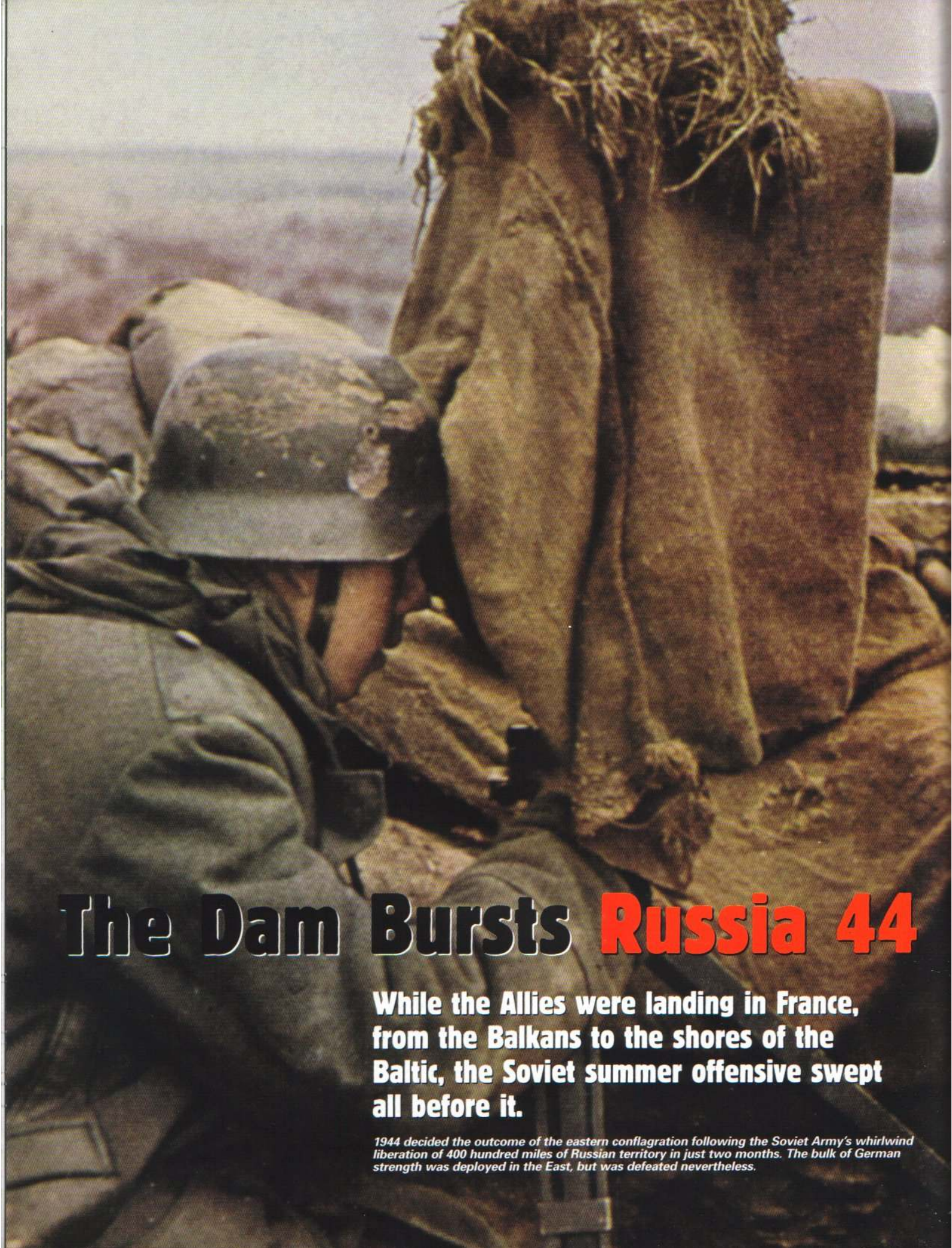
his element, soothing the Windsors with a trip to Karinhall and a go on his gargantuan train set. The duke left Germany, singing the praises of Hitler's labour policies.

FITTING END

Ley's organisation eventually proved a disaster for German workers. Hours lengthened and pay remained static. Workers who put down money for a 'peoples' car', the legendary Volkswagen, were disappointed: not a single one was ever delivered. Ley stole the assets of the pre-existing unions and anticipated Robert Maxwell by plundering German pension schemes. During the war, Ley's drinking ran out of control, he

would often turn up drunk to Party meetings. Goebbels tried to limit the damage, but Ley remained in office until the end. In March 1945, with the Russians approaching Berlin, Ley suddenly decided he could organise resistance action in Austria, and made a sudden farewell to his Führer.

Arrested by the Allies, Ley was indicted at Nuremberg on 20 October and charged with crimes against humanity. He claimed to have known nothing, a litany that prosecutors were to become accustomed to that autumn. But four days later, using a rope fashioned from strips torn from a towel, Ley succeeded in hanging himself in his cell, saving the United Nations a length of hemp.



The Dam Bursts **Russia 44**

While the Allies were landing in France, from the Balkans to the shores of the Baltic, the Soviet summer offensive swept all before it.

1944 decided the outcome of the eastern conflagration following the Soviet Army's whirlwind liberation of 400 hundred miles of Russian territory in just two months. The bulk of German strength was deployed in the East, but was defeated nevertheless.

AT STALINGRAD the Red Army had learned how to stop the German Army. After Kursk, it was to show that it could drive the invader backwards. The Germans reflected the other side of the coin. Before Stalingrad they went to the Russian front with their spirits buoyed up in the crusading ideal and the firm belief that German efficiency and courage would eventually bring victory. After Kursk, new recruits went up to the line dispirited by tales, spread by returning veterans, of great Mongol hordes threatening to descend on the German homelands.

The Germans had lost vast tracts of territory in the relentless campaigning in the last six months of 1943. They had lost vast reserves of trained men and equipment. Although the Soviets had lost even more, they had apparently no difficulty in finding replacements.

By the early summer of 1944, the Red Army was the biggest land force ever put on the field of battle in recorded history. By that time close on 20 million Russian men and women were wearing service uniform. A very high proportion of those serving were at what the Western Allies called 'the sharp end'—a far higher proportion than in the Western armies. But for the Soviets, the 'Sharp End' was more akin to the head of a sledgehammer.

The Red Army was basically an infantry force with a primitive supply and administration service. It was manned by soldiers of immense toughness and physical strength. The infantryman was able to carry heavier loads for longer distances than most; and his birthright had conditioned him to withstand colder temperatures, on smaller rations, than many in the West would have believed possible. No welfare services absorbed Red Army personnel strength for there were no such things as leave, regular pay or even contact with the family; all that was behind him. The Soviet soldier was subject to a draconian



Above: Soviet armour awaits the next offensive. Russian tanks were available in enormous quantities, dwarfing the numbers produced by the Reich's factories. 11,000 T-34s were produced in 1944 alone.

Below: The Soviets had learnt well from the masters of Blitzkrieg. They concentrated their main thrust at the weakest point in the German lines, and simply by-passed more strongly held positions.



military discipline of a type not seen in the British army since the days of the Crimean War. In addition, the infantryman had a very short life expectancy, enjoyed little medical attention if he was wounded, and none at all if he was ill. One of the best of the divisional German commanders, Hasso von Mantetuffel, later wrote:

"The advance of a Russian Army is something that Westerners cannot imagine. Behind the tank spearheads rolls on a vast horde, largely mounted on horses. The soldier carries a

sack on his back, with dry crusts of bread and raw vegetables collected on the march from the fields and villages. The horses eat the straw from the house roofs—they get very little else. The Russians are accustomed to carry on for as long as three weeks in this primitive way, when advancing."

In 1944 the Soviets' armoured forces had received massive reinforcements. The formidable output of armour from Russia's factories was supplemented by tanks sent by her allies, although the western tank designs were of



Above: Unlike their seemingly superhuman opponents, the German armies at the Front enjoyed plentiful supplies of food and tobacco. The ever-present fear of death could be better faced with a full stomach.

Below: The exhaustion is clear on the faces of these men of the Grossdeutschland division. The Wehrmacht fought with its customary efficiency, but its men were too outnumbered to halt the Soviets.



little use in the extreme fighting conditions on the Eastern Front. The British Valentines and American Shermans did however see some limited service down in the Caucasus. More valuable however were American supplies of basic material – sheet steel, leather, blankets, canvas tents, first-aid packs and shiploads of iron rations – which were appreciated by the Soviet soldiers though they rarely knew who supplied them. However, there was one significant contribution that Western industry made towards the Soviet advance – some 500,000 motor vehicles which were putting the Red Army on wheels for the first time in its history. Now a continuous line of GMC built trucks brought supplies up to the frontline. They provided the Red Army leviathan with all the requirements to smash the force which had so brutally invaded their country, and whose more extreme elements had carried out such bestial crimes upon the Soviet people.

RELIEF OF LENINGRAD

During the remaining months of the winter campaign in early 1944, before the Russian weather brought the time of floods again and stopped any movement, the Soviets relieved Leningrad. They ended the torment of a population that had been besieged for 900 days. But the Russians did not stop there. In the South Tobulkin's 4th Ukrainian Front cleared the Germans from the Crimea. Then a lull temporarily descended upon the Russian Front from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Three years to the day after Barbarossa had been launched – 22 June 1944, the great Soviet summer offensive opened. From Velikie Luki in the north around a huge arc to Kovel below the Pripet Marshes, the artillery of four Red Army Fronts – 15 armies – crashed out, while the aircraft of four air armies flew overhead. The infantry and tanks – increased over normal establishment by more than 60 per cent – moved out of their

concentration areas into the attack. Their objective was, firstly, the annihilation of German Army Group Centre. This not inconsiderable concentration of three infantry armies and one panzer army under General Busch had a complement of over a million men with 1,000 panzers and 1,400 aircraft in support. Then the Soviets planned to drive from the soil of Russia the Finnish and German armies to the north, and the Hungarian, Romanian and German armies to the south.

NO LET-UP

Within a week, the three main bastions of the German defences had been first cut off, then captured – Vitebsk in the north by converging attacks from one army of Bagramyan's 1st Baltic Front above and one of Chernyakovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front below; Mogilev by two armies of Zakharov's 2nd Belorussian Front, and Bobruisk by the armies of Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front. The latter moved in force by stealth, over countless small rivers and lakes at night, then attacked out of marshy ground that their opponents had considered impassable. Parts of two panzer corps were cut off and bombed into disintegration, and then Rokossovsky's armies took Bobruisk with 24,000 prisoners.

By 4 July, both Zakharov's men and Chernyakovsky's had driven forward nearly 150 miles leaving only one pocket of German resistance behind which surrendered on 11 July. Meanwhile, Rokossovsky's 28th Army was approaching Pinsk, and except in the north around Daugavpils (Dvinsk), the Germans were back over the old pre-war Soviet-Polish border.

The momentum never flagged. Everywhere the Germans were in full retreat, though they turned and struck back ferociously at times. Nevertheless, armies of the 1st Baltic Front forced the Dvina and took Polotsk within days; Chernyakovsky's and Zakharov's armies, having already cut off 105,000 Germans as they crossed

SOVIET STEAM ROLLER



Above right: By 1944 the Soviet factories which had been evacuated beyond the Urals were at full stretch. Standardisation, mass production and mobilisation of the civilian population were introduced far earlier than in Germany.

Above: Despite significant supplies of American trucks, most Soviet soldiers had only one way of keeping up with their swiftly advancing armour. However, infantry travelling in such an exposed manner could swiftly be swept from the tanks hulls by German counter-fire.

Right: Western-made tanks provided for use by the Red Army were generally too narrowly tracked for the conditions in Russia, and too thinly armoured – as the Americans were finding out for themselves – to brave the German anti-tank guns.



the Beresina, drove for Vilnius and Bialystok, taking the latter at the end of the month and causing General Guderian to note caustically in his diary, "Army Group Centre has now ceased to exist."

BALTIC COLLAPSE

Immediately to the north, Chernakovsky's right flank drove on from Vilnius to Kaunas in Lithuania and by the end of August had reached the borders of East Prussia. Further north Bagramyan's Baltic Front armies crossed into both Latvia and Lithuania and sent an armoured raid up to the Gulf of Riga. Brest-Litovsk fell to Rokossovsky on 28 July and soon afterwards his forces had reached the Bug, north of Warsaw, while on his left Chuikov's Eighth Guards Army had stormed out of Kovel in mid-July, captured Lublin and reached the Vistula, which they crossed on 2 August.

Marshal Koniev's armies on the Ukrainian Front had not been embroiled at the start of the

offensive, but on 13 July they drove forwards against very strong resistance from Army Group North Ukraine. It was in this sector of the front that the Germans had been expecting the Soviet onslaught. The Soviets were compelled to throw in two more tank armies from reserve on 16 July. Finally their tremendous weight of men and firepower began to tell and the defences cracked. 40,000 Germans were surrounded near Brody, Rokossovsky's right-hand army drove straight to the Vistula, crossed it and formed a bridgehead at Sandomir, one tank army flanked Lwow to the north and another was thrown into a direct assault which captured the city on 27 July. Przemyśl fell, followed by Mielec at one end of the front and Nadvornaya at the southern end.

By the end of August, the Carpathians had been reached along their main length, the Polish border was behind the Red Army positions which had now closed up to the old borders with

Czechoslovakia and with Hungary. In two months the Soviet troops had advanced 450 miles, at great cost but also inflicting enormous losses on their enemies, and now the time had come again to reorganise the supply lines for the next advance.

But to their south, another campaign was about to open, with perhaps more political motivation than military; the Balkans were as great an attraction to Stalin as they had been for centuries to the Romanovs.

AXIS DISINTEGRATION

On 20 August, the 52nd Army of Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front broke through the defences of Army Group Ukraine in the Pruth valley opposite Jassy. The Sixth Tank Army immediately followed and by the 24th were near Leovo, where they met two of Tolbukhin's mechanised corps which had forced the lower Dniester into Bessarabia.

They had isolated the German Sixth Army and intended to grip and destroy it, when political

events intervened. A coup d'état took place in Bucharest.

Marshal Antonescu was overthrown, King Michael took his place, the government promptly sued for peace with the Allies, and immediately two Romanian armies laid down their arms, and southern Bessarabia, the Danube delta and the Carpathian passes to the north lay open to the Soviet armies. By the end of the month, Romania was in the process of being occupied by the Red Army, and Bulgaria to the south was about to be invaded by one of Tolbukhin's armies, driving down the Black Sea coast through Constanta. At this point a pro-Allied group of officers seized control in Sofia and welcomed the Red Army, so turning the invasion into 'a visit by friendly forces'. These raced through the capital on 15 September, collected two Bulgarian armies and pressed on to the Yugoslav border opposite Bor in the north and Skopje in the south.

By 8 September, Malinovsky's



Above: One of the German army's biggest problems lay in tackling the relentless pressure imposed by Russian partisans. It was a vicious struggle in which neither side gave quarter.

Below: After three years in the hell of the Eastern Front, the spit and polish as beloved of the Prussian army was gone. But the fighting ability of the individual German soldier remained high.



Below: Soviet T-34s, laden with infantry, on the offensive. This superlative weapon has a claim to being the finest fighting vehicle of the twentieth century.

armies had joined Tolbukhin's. On 28 September they moved forward together to link up with Marshal Tito's Partisans while 46th Army of 2nd Ukrainian Front, drove in over the Roumanian border north of the Danube. But German Army Group F under General Weichs was holding open an escape route for both themselves and Army Group E under General Lohr, rapidly retreating up through Greece. Weich's men put up such stout resistance that it was 20 October before Belgrade was in Allied hands and then only after the bulk of both German army groups had raced north through the gap to join a hastily forming defence line in Hungary, where yet another attempt to desert the Axis had been foiled.

HORTHY DEPOSED

Admiral Horthy had never been an enthusiastic follower of Nazi or even Fascist doctrine, and had only agreed to Hungarian co-operation in the war against the Soviet Union the previous March, when Hitler threatened full-scale occupation of the country. On 16 October, Horthy declared a withdrawal from the Pact and announced that he wished for an armistice with the Allies. However, before he could carry out his plans, he had been virtually kidnapped by the German commando Otto Skorzeny (who had rescued

Mussolini from the Gran Sasso the previous summer), and German armies from Austria poured in, later to be reinforced by the formations from Greece and Yugoslavia.

BUDAPEST DEFIANT

By the time Malinovsky's and Tolbukhin's armies had assembled for a drive up from the Lake Balaton area, not only were the Germans in some force throughout Hungary, but Budapest in particular was strongly held and fortified. In November, the Soviet armies were fighting their way north on each side of the Hungarian capital, slowly, implacably, but at great cost and with little of the energy and momentum of the previous months. On 25 December 1944, when divisions of the 2nd Ukrainian front which had fought all the way from the Dniester met to the west of Budapest, they called a halt. There were a 180,000 Germans and Hungarians inside the city and there was no chance of taking it by storm.

They therefore set about preparing for a full-scale siege. The Soviets brought up super-heavy artillery from hundreds of miles back in the Soviet Union, together with extra divisions from reserves and supplies from wherever they could be found. The final assault would have to wait until 1945.



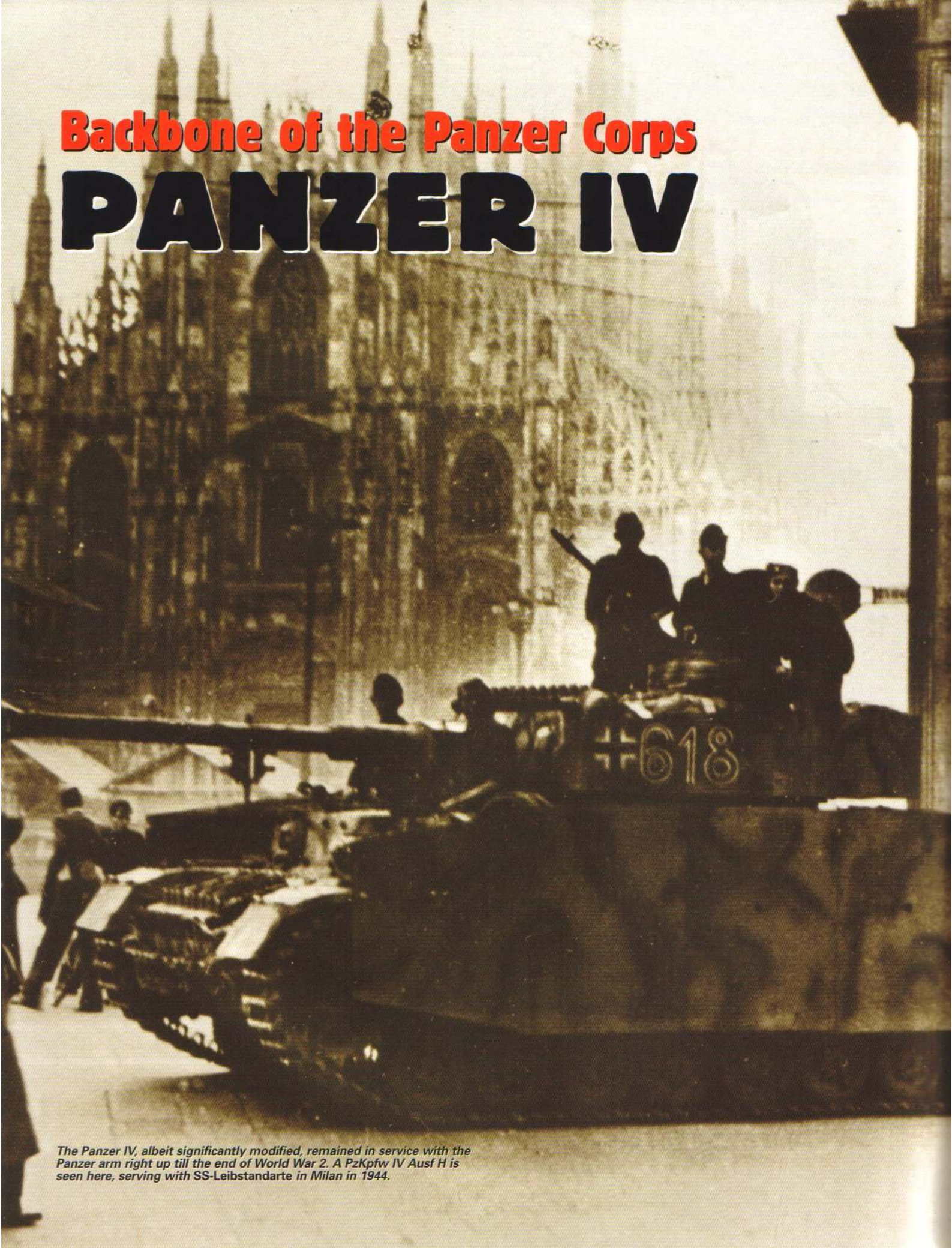


Destruction of Army Group Centre



Backbone of the Panzer Corps

PANZER IV



The Panzer IV, albeit significantly modified, remained in service with the Panzer arm right up till the end of World War 2. A PzKpfw IV Ausf H is seen here, serving with SS-Leibstandarte in Milan in 1944.



The Panzer IV figured prominently in German reporting of the early Blitzkrieg campaigns. This belied the reality. The mainstay of the panzer divisions at this time were the lighter PzKpfw IIIs, IIs and Czech-built 38Ts.



The Panzer IV was the workhorse of the Panzerwaffe. Its twin virtues of reliability and durability ensured its survival to the end of the war.

THERE ARE MANY candidates for the 'best' tank of the Second World War. The Russian T-34 came as such a disagreeable surprise to the Germans in 1941 and played a major part in their defeat; the Panther set the standard by which post-war tanks were judged; the Tiger was so powerful it could take on four or five times its own number of enemy tanks. But only one main battle tank in frontline service at the beginning of the war could still be found in quantity in 1945, still able to hold its own. This was the Panzer IV. The first production model was

built in 1936 to a design finalized over the previous two years. Panzer IVs were still coming off the assembly lines in 1945 as the Allied armies entered Germany.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Ausführung A, the first production version of the Panzer IV, was intended to take on enemy infantry and anti-tank guns while other German tanks dealt with enemy armour. Tanks were to grow enormously during the 1940s, but at the time the Panzer IV was designed, the relatively light vehicles of the time were not capable of carrying a major calibre, high velocity gun. Most carried

small, high velocity guns of about 40 mm calibre, intended to fire armour-piercing shells. Many of the latter were actually solid slugs of metal containing no explosive filling. Other tanks carried light howitzers of about 75 mm calibre, short barrelled weapons intended to lob explosive shells at enemy strong points, infantry or crew-served weapons. The only way to combine both requirements was to carry both types of gun: hence the French Char B1 and American M3 Lee/Grant which had a small calibre anti-tank gun in the turret and a howitzer in the front hull.

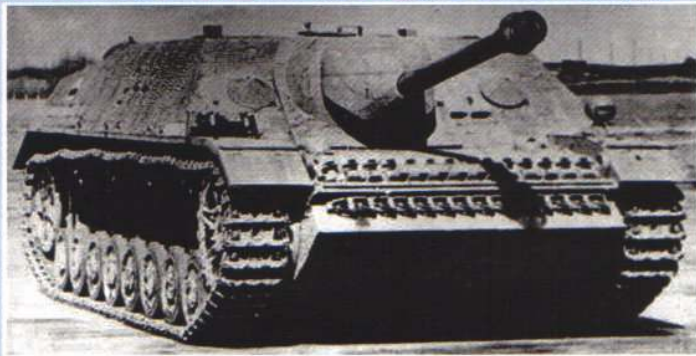
The Panzer IVA was armed with a 75 mm L/24, i.e. the length of the barrel was 24 times the calibre. It had one 7.92 mm machine gun in the turret, co-axial with the howitzer and another in the front hull. The driver sat on the left with the radio operator/hull machine gunner on the right.

The commander sat in the rear centre of the turret, with the gunner on the left of the howitzer breech and the loader on the right.

TALKING HEADS

The Panzer IV carried 122 rounds of 75 mm ammunition and 3000 for its machine guns. A smoke bomb rack on the stern rack was later replaced by smoke grenade dischargers on the turret sides. Other useful features included a pair of blue lights in the driver's position, alerting him to allow extra room if the turret was traversed to either side. Communications — the unglamorous key to so many German tank victories on the Russian front — comprised of an intercom with back-up voice-tube connecting the gunner and commander. Voice communication with other tanks was possible up to 6,000 metres; Morse signals could be transmitted up to 10,000 metres.

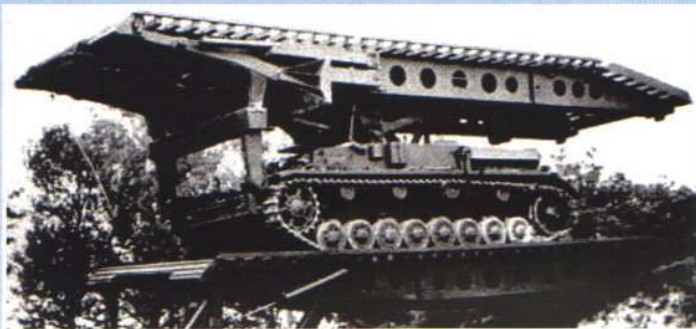
Robust and versatile

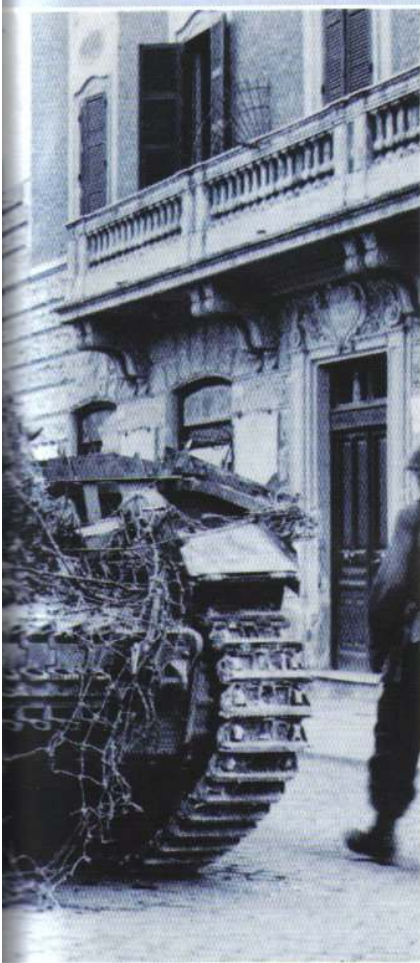


Above: The Panzerjäger IV carried a very long (L/70) 75 mm gun in an enclosed fighting compartment. Notable for its very low height that made it easy to conceal, this was a deadly menace to the high-sided Shermans of the British and American tank regiments.

Below: An Infanterie Sturmsteg auf PzKpfw IV (infantry assault) bridge mounted on a Panzer IV Ausf C. Only four were built and saw service in France in 1940 and Russia in 1941.

Bottom: The Nashorn (Rhinceros) was an improvised solution to Soviet heavy tanks: a Panzer IV with an 88 mm gun in an open fighting compartment.





Left: From 1943 the six-gun heavy batteries of artillery in the panzer divisions began to receive the Hummel, (bumblebee), a Panzer IV chassis with a 150 mm howitzer in an open-topped fighting compartment. The first 100 Hummels had their debut during operation Zitadelle (Citadel) in the summer of 1943.

Centre Left: The Brummbär (Grizzly bear) had a stubby 150 mm howitzer. Space was limited; less than 40 heavy rounds were carried and fighting conditions for the five man crew were cramped. Developed for street fighting the tank was effective against infantry dug-in positions or any kind of stronghold. Some of the 298 produced took part in suppressing the Warsaw uprising in 1944.



Above and left: In 1942, Krupp-Gruson originated the concept of a Waffenträger (weapon carrier)(left). The turret (mounting a 105 mm gun) could be removed with the use of the crane mounted in the back of the vehicle, and then placed on a prepared concrete base as an armoured pillbox. At the same time, the turretless vehicle could be used as an ammunition carrier or recovery vehicle. Rheinmetall-Borsig developed a competing prototype (above).

Centre left: Quadruple 20 mm cannon mounted on the H or J chassis reached the frontline at the end of 1943. Its rectangular shape led to it being dubbed the mobelwagen (removal van).

Out Gunned: Russia 1941

THE GERMANS underestimated Soviet tank design and production. They received a rude awakening when the Wehrmacht encountered the new T-34s and KVs, whose existence had not even been suspected. Overnight the German armour designs were rendered obsolete: not only were the new Soviet tanks formidable fighting machines, but their simplicity of design facilitated mass production and operation by relatively inexperienced crews.

Right: The scourge of the panzer formations was the superlative T-34. Only Soviet inexperience in handling massed armour saved Germany from catastrophe in 1941.

Below and below right: The Kliment Voroshilov (KV) 1 first appeared in the inauspicious Finnish campaign in 1940. Its armour and armament posed significant problems for Wehrmacht gunners.



METAMORPHOSIS

Hitler's generals revised the specifications of most of their weapons with tiresome regularity, reducing output, as machines were re-tooled for what often turned out to be the most marginal improvements. The Panzer IV evolved enormously over its ten year career, although the earliest variants were built in very small numbers: 35 'A' models, 42 'B'

models, 134 'C' models and 229 'D' types. By 1938 the 'E' type had been authorised. Weight increased from 17 to 21 tons as a larger, 320 hp engine was installed and additional armour fitted. After the fall of France the design was changed again, the 'F' type finishing over a ton heavier with wider tracks to prevent ground pressure becoming a problem. Less ammunition was carried: 80

rounds of 75 mm shell and 2,700 for the machine guns.

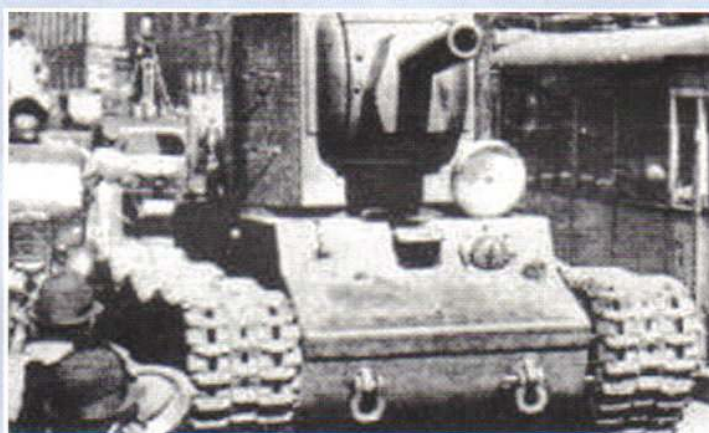
'HEAVY' COMPANY

The German army intended the Panzer IV to form a fourth 'heavy' company within each tank battalion. However, there were only about 200 Panzer IVs in service when Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland: just 10% of the tank force. It was much the same in 1940, 278 of the

2,439 German tanks were Panzer IVs. Both campaigns highlighted the need for tanks to be able to deal with anti-tank guns. Difficult to see from a moving tank (until it was too late) anti-tank guns accounted for most German tank casualties. The Germans showed they had learned their lesson the following year in the North African desert. Their armour drew British tanks



The wide-open spaces of the Russian plain showed up the lack of mobility in the KV-1. But the tank was improved and was to lead to the powerful Josef Stalin tanks.



Top: The best that the Germans could field against the Soviet armour was not good enough. The short-barelled gun could not compete with the Soviets 76.2 mm, fielded by the KV-1 and T-34.

Above: The Pak 37, (in the foreground) the standard German infantry support gun, was ineffective against the KV-2. Infantry were forced to take on tanks at suicidal range.

Left: In an attempt to provide their tank forces with mobile artillery the Soviets introduced the KV-2. This was a none-to-successful marriage of the KV-1 chassis and a large slab-sided turret mounting a 152 mm gun.

forward, on to hidden lines of anti-tank guns that inflicted the real execution — a tactic it took the British some time to understand.

The British were impressed with the Panzer IV; they shipped several captured examples from Africa to the UK for extensive evaluation. They noted with dismay that even its side armour was immune to the standard British 2-pdr (40 mm)

anti-tank gun. Its armour was rated as ten per cent better than the British equivalent, although the quality of the welding was criticized and the Maybach engine was patently not designed for tropical climates. The air filters were inadequate, over-heating common and sand got into the carburettor. (Not that British tanks were any different in these respects.)

COLD-START

The Panzer IV was not designed for arctic conditions either, but found itself in the grip of the Russian winter at the end of 1941. It had a 24-volt electric starter motor, but the extreme conditions caused the sump oil to congeal until near-frozen. Hand cranking was possible, if a good test of fitness. Two men were required to get it going, while the driver sat inside,

depressing the clutch. Experience from the first Russian winter led to a modification on subsequent Panzer IVs. The *kühlwasserübertragung* (cold water exchanger) enabled one tank with its engine started, and warmed to normal operating temperature, to exchange coolant with another tank. The (unstarted) tank received warm coolant before the crew began



the engine start sequence.

AFRICAN DEBUT

The Panzer IV was up-gunned to cope with the greater firepower and sloping armour of the Soviet tanks encountered during the Barbarossa campaign. The British first encountered this new Panzer IV at Alam Halfa in August 1942, 27 newly arrived F2 models leading Rommel's attack on the British 22nd Armoured

Brigade. Equipped with Grant tanks, the British suffered badly, one 12-tank squadron was annihilated in minutes. 'These Mark IVs have a very long gun on them; in fact it looks the devil of a gun', the British commander noted.

By mid-1944 panzer divisions were supposed to have a battalion of Panzer IVs and one of Panzer Vs (Panthers) but the latter were slow to arrive and

many a panzer division found itself in battle that year with its Panther battalion still forming up on a German training area. The final production model, the 'J' appeared in 1944, something of an 'economy' version in which the power-traverse for the turret was omitted. The room saved by the removal of the electric motor was used for additional fuel, increasing the tank's operational range from 200/131 km (road/cross-country) to 300/181 km. Given the irregularity with which fuel supplies now reached the panzer divisions, the increase in onboard capacity was useful. Slowness to traverse was presumably accepted with some willingness by a panzer arm now using so many assault guns as substitute tanks anyway. In response to the increasing danger from the air, the roof armour was thickened.

POST-WAR CAREER

Panzer IVs were supplied in small quantities to various German allies including Finland,

Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. Some saw action against German forces when the Romanians and Bulgarians changed sides. But the long combat career of the Panzer IV enjoyed a bizarre postscript in 1967. France supplied Syria with a number of Panzer IVs that were employed in cross border shooting incidents during 1965. Apart from the addition of a Soviet 12.7 mm machine gun on the roof, these Panzer IVs were little changed from the wartime models. They survived an inconclusive exchange with Israeli Centurions, thanks to the Soviet-built (and Soviet controlled) heavy artillery in support. The Panzer IVs were still in position on the Golan Heights two years later when the area was conquered by the IDF. At least one Panzer IV was engaged and destroyed by an Israeli 'Super Sherman' in a very hands-on re-enactment of World War II.



Above: In the 1950s the Soviets sold some captured Panzer IVs to the Syrians. Some of these may have been sold to Batista in Cuba before his overthrow. Others were captured at the Golan Heights by the Israelis in 1967.

The final production model was the PzKpfw IV Ausf J which appeared from March 1944. The tank still retained a respectable power to weight ratio, inspite of its modifications.



THE IRON-CLADS



Above: Side skirts of 5 mm armour plate were introduced as protection from bazookas. The slab sides and curved plates around the turret led many a PzKpfw IV to be identified by Allied soldiers in Normandy as a Tiger.



Above: With its devastating 75 mm L48, the Panzer IV was able to fight on until 1945. It was demonstrably superior to the western Allies main battle tank, the Sherman or the T-34/76.



Centre left: The Panzer IVH was nose-heavy and tended to jink from side to side when on the move. Weighing 25 tons, even with an improved transmission, practical speed dropped to little more than 15 km/h.

Left: The Panzer IVH was the most numerous type seeing service. 3,774 were built from in the year to July 1944. They became the mainstay of the Panzerwaffe.



FOREIGN NAZIS

Czech Nazis salute the obliteration of the country of Czechoslovakia on 5 April 1939. Slovakia was given 'independence', though in reality it was nothing more than a Nazi puppet state. Bohemia and Moravia became a Reich protectorate under Konstantin von Neurath, with the eager assistance of the Nazi-inspired and funded Sudeten German Party.



Mussolini was the role model for pre-war Fascist leaders: few who followed the Nazi model achieved any political success before the war.

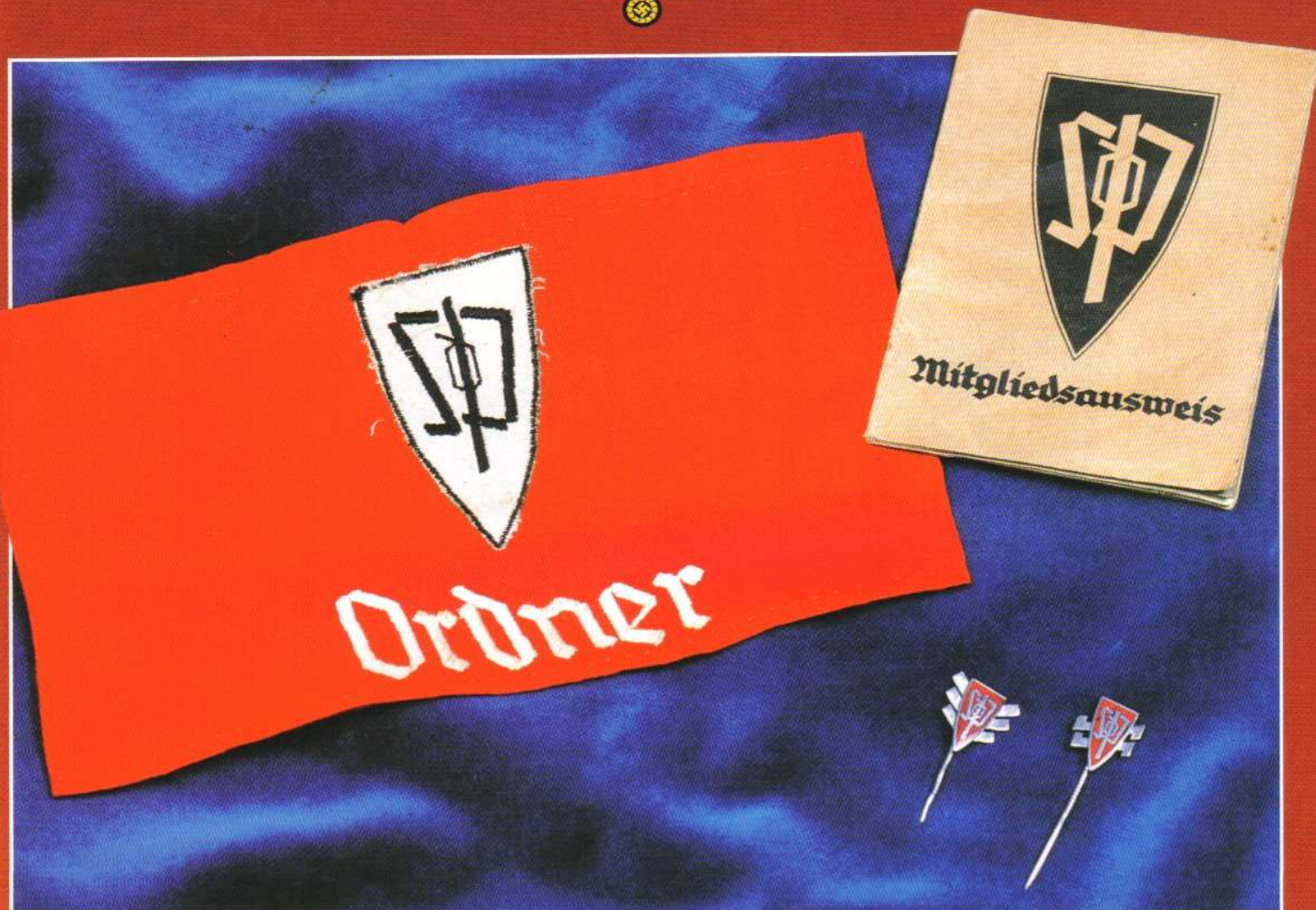
THE FIRST FASCIST political party came into being in 1919 and was followed by an array of imitators. In many ways,

Mussolini's fascist movement was the model on which all other right-wing nationalist organisations were based. Authoritarian, anti-communist and anti-democratic movements came to power in Hungary, Austria, Poland, Romania, Spain, Portugal and Argentina as well as in Germany.

Fascists had their greatest following in Catholic countries, or in predominantly Catholic areas of more heterogeneous states; Catholicism fostered the centralist and hierarchical state of mind under which such regimes prospered.

GERMAN-STYLE NAZIS

The success of Hitler and the Nazis in the 1930s inspired a number of Fascist parties on the German model. Those in states with a democratic, secular tradition remained fringe movements. Sir Oswald Moseley's Blackshirts, the British Union of Fascists, held some spectacular meetings on the



Above: The Sudeten German Home Front was founded in October 1933 by Konrad Henlein. It was renamed the Sudetendeutsche Partei – Sudeten German Party or SdP – in 1935. By this time it was an overtly Nazi organisation, largely funded from Berlin. The membership book, armband and lapel badges seen here date from after the change.

Right: Norway's Nasjonal Samling or National Assembly was a Fascist splinter party headed by former army officer Vidkun Quisling. Unlike the Sudeten Nazis, Quisling had little popular support, and he was little more than a German figurehead. This did not stop him issuing a whole set of awards and insignia: these are a labour collar patch, a ski-cap badge and a service medal.



Reichsparteitag model, and fought running street battles with socialists and Communists in London's East End. But their right-wing, anti-semitic message was not popular, and these extremists stood no chance of achieving power. The same could be said of Fritz Kuhn's German-American *Bund*.

Similar fringe parties were formed in Belgium, where Leon Degrelle's Catholic Rexist movement had some small success, but Vidkun Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* in Norway and Anton Mussert's *National-Socialistische Beweging* enjoyed

little popular support. Neither had a hope of achieving any power until their countries were occupied by the Germans in 1940. Even then they remained totally under the thumb of their German overlords.

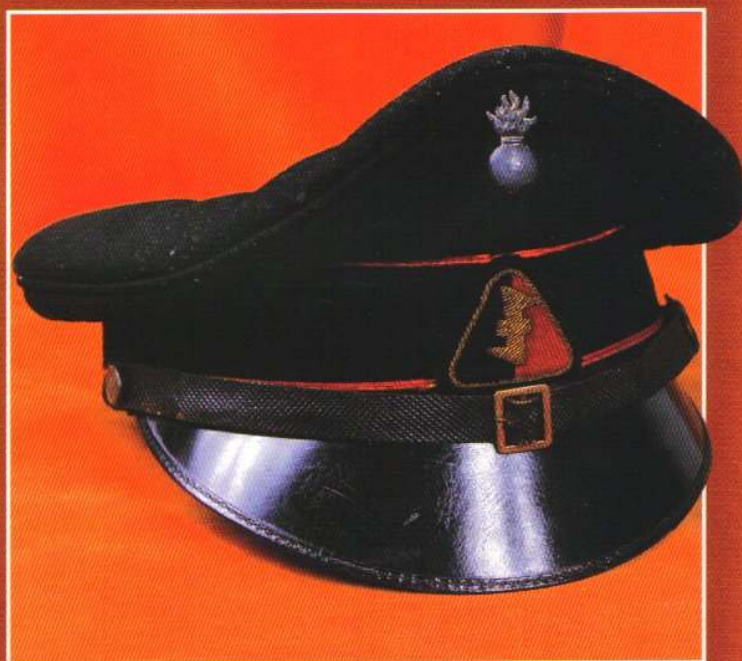
Only in Austria and the Sudetenland did German-style Fascism really take hold. The Austrian NSDAP mounted an unsuccessful putsch in 1934 before engineering the *Anschluss* four years later, and Konrad Henlein's 'Sudeten German Party' were instrumental in forging the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.



Following the lead of most Fascist-inspired organisations, the Nationaal Socialistisch Beweging had an active youth movement. The movement's symbol was the Seagull: it appeared on the Astrakhan fur side-cap and on the car pennant used by youth leaders.



Left: The NSB was organised into Weer Afdeelingen (WA, or Storm Detachments) which combined to make up a Vendel or Division. The NSB made extensive use of the traditional Dutch colour of orange in place of the Nazi red, and many of their badges and insignia carried the 'Wolfshook' rune. The rank badge, epaulette, cap badge and cuff title seen here were worn by a member of the Dietschland Vendel.



Right: An NSB peaked visor cap with triangular 'Wolfshook' insignia and flaming grenade badge. The 'Wolfshook' rune derives from the ancient Germanic Wolfsangel, which was supposed to be a magical symbol able to frighten wolves. The symbol was also used by SS Division Das Reich and by late-war 'Werewolf' units.



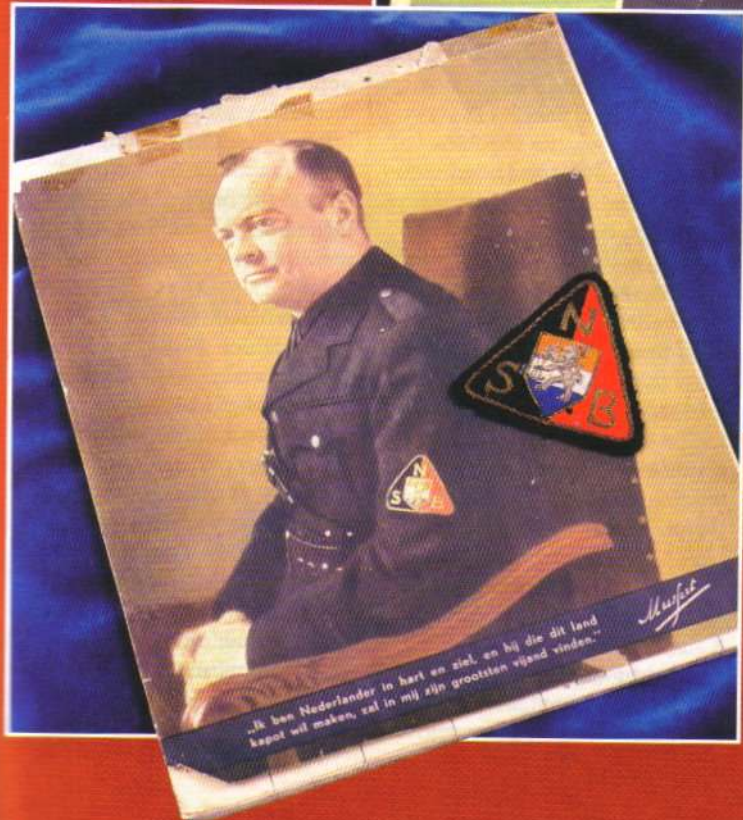
Holland's home-grown Nazis

Anton Mussert founded the *Nationaal Socialistische Beweging* in 1931 whilst he was a middle-level civil servant. Initially influenced by the Italian Fascists, the movement evolved into a Nazi-style Party. Anti-Semitic and anti-Communist in nature, the NSB platform also included a desire to unite the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Flanders. The new country was to be called *Dietschland*.

BRIEF POPULARITY

In 1933, Mussert could attract less than 600 people to a meeting in Utrecht, where the Party was based. A year later, some 25,000 turned out. Mussert's growing political profile was not popular with his employers, and he was fired from his government job for "pernicious political activity and treachery to the state."

The Party reached a peak of popularity in the 1935 elections, polling over 300,000 votes, but most of these gains were lost in the 1937 elections. Appointed assistant to *Reichskommissar* Artur Seyss-Inquart after the German occupation, Mussert and his Party's active collaboration with the Nazis saw him tried for treason after the war. The Party was banned, and Mussert was condemned to die. He was hanged in May 1946.



Above: Anton Adrian Mussert was the founder and leader of the Dutch National Socialist Movement. Born in 1894, he trained as a hydraulic engineer, and after World War I worked as a civil servant with the Department of Dykes, Roads, Bridges and Canals. He was notably anti-Semitic: the headline on this poster reads "No Jews".

Left: In common with all fascist leaders, Mussert attempted to establish a personality cult. Very few of the images used in publicity material such as this calendar gave any clue that the Leader or 'Leader' was less than five feet tall. The arm badge depicted shows the NSB's emblem: the divided red and black triangle symbolises 'Blood and Soil' (a belief the NSB shared with the Nazis) while the central shield depicts the national lion on the Dutch colours of orange-white-blue.



Wehrmacht Heeres

In the 1930s Hitler rebuilt the army, emasculated at Versailles. By 1939 it had new weapons, tactics and a desire for revenge.

BY 1938 THE German peacetime army (*das Heer*) was larger than the Kaiser's had been in 1914. It was an open secret that it was planning to have a re-match of the

1914–18 war. This represented a catastrophic defeat for the Allied powers of the First World War: they had coined the term 'war to end all wars' and the Versailles Treaty was supposed to ensure an end to the spectre of

Prussian militarism.

One by one, the shackles imposed in 1919 had been broken. The 100,000-man restriction on the manpower of the Reichswehr, the possession of tanks and an air force, and the abolition of the General Staff were all overturned. The army that had terrified Edwardian Europe was back with a vengeance, with a revanchist dictator in place of the tragi-comic Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Some of the equipment fielded by Hitler's army would have been a revelation to the Kaiser's generals. Tanks, derided by the German army in 1917, now formed an armoured spearhead. Radio equipment

enabled panzer generals like Heinz Guderian to have the battle 'at his fingertips', as he – a signals officer during the First World War – so readily appreciated. On the other hand, the basic equipment of the infantry was little changed from Hitler's time in the trenches. And at the head of the army, the influence of the General Staff remained paramount.

PRUSSIAN GLORY

When Hitler was born, there was a popular aphorism that claimed there were just five perfect institutions in the world: the British parliament, the Roman curia, Russian ballet, French opera – and the Prussian General Staff. The General Staff's ascetic experts triumphed over the numerically superior, but clumsy Austro-Hungarian army in 1866. In 1870, the panache of the French Second Empire counted for



Left: The German army, revitalised by Hitler's aggressive rearmament policy in the 1930s exploded onto the world scene in September 1939. For two years, the Wehrmacht war machine exploited the unpreparedness and tactical staleness of its opponents.

Above: The high point of German military success was the defeat of France in June 1940. The Wehrmacht General Staff were won over to Hitler's cause by the stunning victory over Germany's traditional enemy.

Below: In June 1941, Hitler made a fatal foreign policy error. Without bringing the British Empire to terms he turned east. With an early victory over the Soviets denied them, the Wehrmacht was committed to a ruinous war of attrition.

nothing in a brutally short contest that destroyed Napoleon III and brought forth the new German Empire. The General Staff was blamed for starting, and nearly winning, the First World War. In 1919 the Allies insisted on its abolition. However, re-designated the *Truppenamt* (Troops office), a department of the *Heeresleitung* (Army Directorate) within the War Ministry, the General Staff survived in all but name and trouser stripes.

The post-war German army was dominated by General Hans von Seeckt. As chief of the Army Directorate from 1920–26, he made sure that former General Staff officers formed a disproportionate element in the *Reichsheer's* officer corps. After 1945 its surviving representatives would claim they kept out of politics, but in fact they presided over the Weimar republic with Olympian

detachment. "Where does the *Reichsheer* stand?" asked the government during the Kapp putsch. "Behind me", was von Seeckt's enigmatic response. The army was the ultimate arbiter of power, as Hitler knew when he first reined in the SA, and later beheaded it using weapons and lorries provided by the army.

QUALITY IN DEPTH

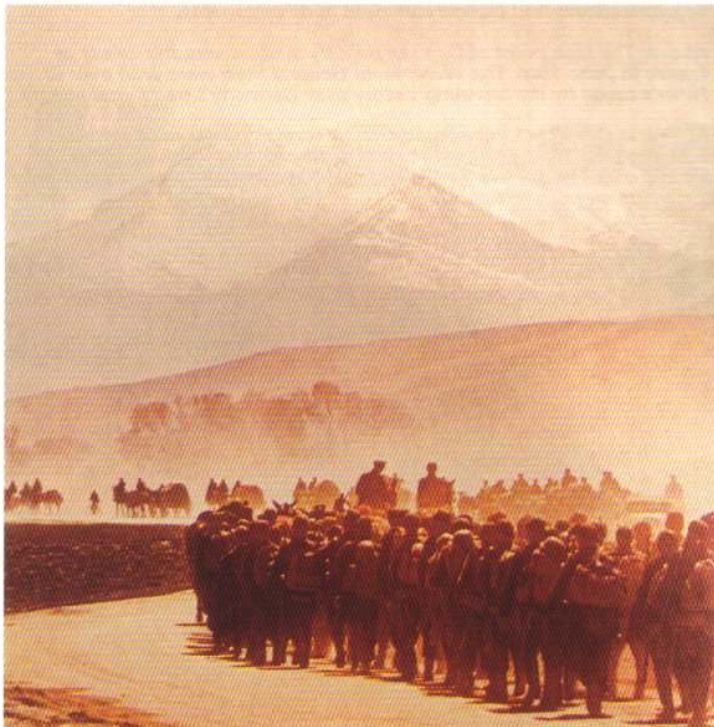
In 1939 the German army fielded 91 infantry divisions (including two light-infantry and three mountain-divisions). The armoured force comprised six tank divisions, four motorised divisions and four mechanised 'light divisions'. In size and ratio between infantry and armour, it was very similar to the French army. It had better and more plentiful anti-aircraft weapons, but most German armoured battalions were equipped with light tanks, inferior to the standard British





Above: German infantry deep within Russia in the summer of 1941. At this time the German army possessed a core of mechanised units, but the majority of its forces were still on foot, relying, for the most part, on horse-drawn transport.

Below: Like some latter-day Roman Imperial army, the Wehrmacht fought its way from the flats of the Low Countries, to the peaks of the Caucasus. A German soldier had to adapt to every climatic extreme presented by the European continent.



the war continued.

POOR INTELLIGENCE

German army intelligence was woefully inadequate. German generals mocked what they thought of as the bloated staffs maintained by British and American commanders. Unfortunately, the 'lean and mean' approach meant that the few genuine intelligence officers available were ridiculously over-worked. The *Ostheer* (Eastern Army – the army in Russia) started out with a wildly optimistic assessment of Red Army strength, which it was obliged to revise at embarrassingly short intervals. In time, the combination of poor German intelligence and cunning Russian deception techniques would enable the Red Army to spring ever bigger and ever nastier surprises, from the Smolensk counter-attack in August 1941 to Stalingrad in November 1942 and Operation Bagration in 1944.

The German army had a similarly minimalist approach to its logistic 'tail'. In 1944 the Allied forces in France comprised some 47 divisions, supplied by a transport fleet with a capacity of 70,000 tons. Lack of trucks was a universal lamentation. Yet the *Ostheer's* transport fleet had only a quarter of that capacity with which to supply three times as many (albeit, smaller) divisions across a vastly wider front. Shortages of fuel, ammunition, clothing and equipment bedevilled every operation.

WIDESPREAD SHORTAGES

Lack of uniformity only added to the trouble. The motorised transport columns were filled out with lorries stolen from all over Europe, and the use of more than 2,000 different types of vehicle created an insurmountable spares shortage. The multiplicity of types was never reduced to manageable levels. Even in 1944 the 12th SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* was issued with

and French types. By June 1941 the number of panzer divisions had increased to 21, by re-designating some of the above formations and by halving the number of tanks per division. The invasion force that struck into Russia comprised 120 German infantry divisions (and 35 allied ones), 21 panzer divisions and 15 motorised infantry divisions.

FRENCH ANNIHILATION

The German army excelled at what modern army officers call 'operational level' – a series of major battles that form a key element in a military campaign. First class staff work in the rear, and the tactical combination of divebombers and tanks at the front, destroyed the French army in a matter of weeks. The first months of the Russian campaign witnessed a succession of staggering victories too: the encirclements at Kiev and Vyazma netted over 500,000 prisoners-of-war each. However, four key weaknesses began to emerge – handicaps that would worsen as



BUILDING THE BEAST

The German army planned for another war at least as early as 1923. It was taken as fact that only through war could Germany regain her freedom and economic independence. A 1926 *Truppenamt* memorandum outlined Germany's objectives as the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the return of the Saar, closing the Polish Corridor and acquiring Upper Silesia. War was anticipated with France, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia. All this was planned before anybody had heard of Hitler, while the Weimar republic was emerging from post-war chaos.

The German army bought into the myth that its defeat in 1918 was due to internal reasons – the 'Stab in the Back' legend – rather than external ones, such as the superior economic strength and manpower of the Allies. The yawning gap between German military capabilities, impressive though they were, and German war aims remained unbridged in 1918 and would re-emerge in 1940-41. However, while the Generals were all for another war, they were alarmed by Hitler's readiness to risk another conflict before their re-armament programme could bear fruit. Nervous over the re-occupation of the Rhineland, they were on the verge of panic during the Sudeten crisis and there were tentative moves towards an army coup d'état. Hitler's triumph at Munich quelled any serious thoughts of revolt and emboldened not just the Führer, but his commanders too.

Like the Luftwaffe and the navy, the German army only expected to be ready for war in the mid-1940s. Its battlefield performance in 1939-41 so stunned its enemies that they christened it *Blitzkrieg* – 'lightning war'. Yet the years of victory were achieved less than halfway through the planned transition into a completely modern army. Whereas the British army was wholly mechanised by 1939 – its last cavalry regiments swapped their chargers for light tanks that year – the German army would remain dependent on animal transport throughout the war.

Over 500,000 horses accompanied the army into Russia, towing



Right: European nations were over-fond of military reviews in the 1930s. Hitler could be counted on to provide the biggest spectacles. The constant military parades persuaded friend and foe alike that Germany was once again a force to be reckoned with.

everything from field guns to ammunition wagons. It was hungry work and fodder is a bulky item to transport, which placed a heavy burden on the overstretched railway network in occupied Russia. Indeed, while Hitler presided over the famous autobahn programme, the Nazis allowed the German railways to deteriorate. Lack of pre-war investment and the loss of so many locomotives to the first winter in Russia left the bulk of the German army actually less mobile than it had been in 1914. While the panzer divisions raced to glory, the rest of Hitler's army marched no faster than Napoleon's.



WEHRKREISE 1941

PRIOR TO THE START of WWII the organisation and administration of the German army were based on the division of the country into 15 command areas, or *Wehrkreis*. They contained the headquarters and component divisions of a corps. Simultaneously they provided the territorial basis for conscription, administration of army property, local defence and virtually all other military matters. Command areas XX and XXI were set up after the Polish campaign. The system was efficient and stood up well under the strain of war.



Above: Infantry units supported by armour in action in Kiev in the summer of 1941. The Wehrmacht nearly realised its aim of destroying the Soviet Union.

Below: Every German soldier was trained to perform the roles of those up to three ranks higher than himself. As such he was the supreme warrior of WWII.



reconditioned Italian trucks; the SS panzer corps that spearheaded the Ardennes offensive that winter was followed by a vintage vehicle parade of 1930s Citroens.

OVER-DESIGNED

The fourth weakness was the failure of German industry to manufacture sufficient modern vehicles to replace losses, let alone enable any expansion. The army played a part in this, burdening every manufacturer and design team with committees of officers that demanded endless minor changes to everything from mortars to half-tracks and tanks. Altered specifications caused production delays and added to the spare parts list.

Hitler began the war with two armies: a small armoured and mechanised core, and a mass of infantry formations little changed from those of 1918. The distinction endured to 1945, the armoured elite growing to 31 panzer and 13 panzergrenadier divisions, while the infantry grew to 197 regular divisions and another 50 volksgrenadier divisions.

From 1943 infantry divisions were reduced from nine to six battalions. In fairness, additional machine guns and mortars (especially captured Russian 120 mm weapons) enabled smaller infantry formations to deliver the same, or a greater volume of fire despite the reduction in manpower. Panzer units also reduced in size: the authorised strength of a division fell from 328 tanks in 1939 to 165 by 1943 and just 54 by the end of the war. However, as with the infantry units, fighting power increased. There was simply no comparison between the machine-gun armed Panzer I of the Polish campaign and the King Tigers and Panthers of 1944 and 1945.

Artillery was a major area of weakness, despite the high proportion of artillery officers

in senior command positions. The German army found itself significantly outgunned from the start of the war. British and American divisions included more than twice as many field guns as their German equivalents; British, US and Soviet forces also had far larger reserves of heavy guns to support major offensives.

To the irritation of ordinary soldiers and generals alike, the German army lost manpower to the other services. Goering's political pull saw the Luftwaffe established as a separate organisation, with an increasing proportion of ground forces. The air force controlled anti-aircraft artillery and, despite the slim prospects for further airborne assaults, whole 'parachute armies' were created alongside Luftwaffe field divisions. The ultimate expression of this was the bizarrely named 'Parachute-Panzer Division' (a conventional tank division recruited from the Luftwaffe). It won itself a considerable fighting reputation, as did some of the parachute divisions, but overall, the Luftwaffe involvement in the army's business concentrated otherwise useful recruits into inexperienced formations led by ill-qualified officers.

The Waffen-SS was a very different matter. The expansion of Himmler's SS from bodyguards to being the private army of a 'state within a state' led to the Waffen-SS enjoying special favour. In the later stages of the war it was the first to receive new tanks, and was at the head of the queue for replacements. The formidable reputation of the SS panzer divisions stemmed from the fierce determination of officers and men, but they were lavishly equipped by army standards.

SS-SCAPEGOATS

The German generals found the SS most useful after the war, when they used it as a

WORKING WITH HITLER

The army high command did not flinch when Hitler had General von Schleicher murdered during the 'Night of the Long Knives'. Like the right-wing career politicians who handed power to Hitler, the generals believed they could control him. That he granted them everything they wished for over the next few years disguised a progressive reversal of the intended relationship: by the time Hitler triggered the Sudeten crisis, the army danced to the Führer's tune. It was a Faustian pact from which the generals could not escape. However, few of them displayed any inclination to even try: a bitter truth they managed to obscure until the 1980s.

The most successful professional soldiers are also consummate politicians. Hitler's generals were all tainted by their association with Hitler, some more deservedly than others. Men like von Reichenau (top left) fervently embraced Nazi racist doctrines. His 6th Army cut an apocalyptic swathe through Russia in the summer of 1942. Von Manstein (top right) was at best a pragmatist. His loyalty went to the highest bidder and he received large bribes from Hitler.

Von Runstedt (centre left), the model of honour, was incorruptible. He considered himself bound by his oath of loyalty. Keitel (centre right) was the greatest example of the 'yes men' who surrounded Hitler for personal advancement. Guderian (bottom left) was won over by Hitler's similar obsession with the panzer formations and Rommel, before disillusion set in, grasped at the opportunities offered by foreign conquest.



Above: The Imperial German General Staff at the Lichterfelde barracks in Berlin during WWI. Despite Hitler's antipathy towards the Prussian officer class, he courted the army without whose support the Nazis would not have gained power.

Below: Hitler in the company of General von Blomberg (centre) a political opportunist, and right-wing stalwart General von Mackensen.





Above: The result of the last European civil war was the destruction of the German army for the second time in half a century. Prussian military autocracy had finally been defeated.

Below: A shot of SS-troopers training to ford a river under fire. Himmler fought a constant battle with OKW to secure the finest recruits and equipment for his elite formations.



scapegoat for atrocities. They were aided by some of their British and American peers and by the celebrated British military pundit, Basil Liddell Hart. Another defeat, another myth: this time that the SS was responsible for all the atrocities, whilst the army just did its patriotic duty. Not until most of the generals were dead did the truth emerge. One example must suffice. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, one of the army's most successful commanders, was released after serving just three years of an 18-year sentence imposed at Nuremberg. He played a leading role in reconstituting the post-war German army, the Bundeswehr, seen by the mid-1950s as an indispensable force with which to defend Western Europe against the Soviet Empire. But his complicity in the Holocaust is now an established fact: paperwork from his headquarters proved

that his anti-Semitism was not limited to pep talks to the troops. In the Ukraine in 1941 he and his officers provided every assistance to the murderers of *Einsatzgruppe D*, even insisting that the army should retain the wrist watches of Jews murdered during joint army-SD operations.

SHAMEFUL LEGACY

The German army emerged from Hitler's war, as it had in 1918, with a worldwide reputation for military skill and courage. However, its laurels have been severely tarnished in recent years. Its generals received lavish bribes from the Nazis all through the war, a surer guarantee of their loyalty than the oath they claimed bound them to the Führer. Their men perpetrated dreadful crimes on the Russian front. It was, ultimately, Hitler's army, and its behaviour reflected that fact.



IN THIS VOLUME OF **HITLER'S** **Third Reich**



HITLER'S BATTLES

While the Allies were landing in France, from the Balkans to the shores of the Baltic, the Soviet summer offensive of 1944 swept all before it.



WAR MACHINE

The Panzer IV was the workhorse of the *Panzerwaffe*. Its twin virtues of reliability and durability ensured its survival to the end of the war.

SECRET HITLER FILES

Hitler's idea of conversation was monologue not dialogue. Incapable of engaging in rational argument, he compelled his audience to listen uncritically to a litany of obsessions.



HITLER'S HENCHMEN

Robert Ley was sadly typical of the Nazi elite.

A die-hard anti-semite, habitual drunkard and wife-beater, he used his power to build up a massive personal fortune.

INSIDE THE THIRD REICH

Corruption permeated the byzantine structure of the Third Reich. Hitler and his deputies abused their absolute power to exploit and plunder the nations of Europe.

